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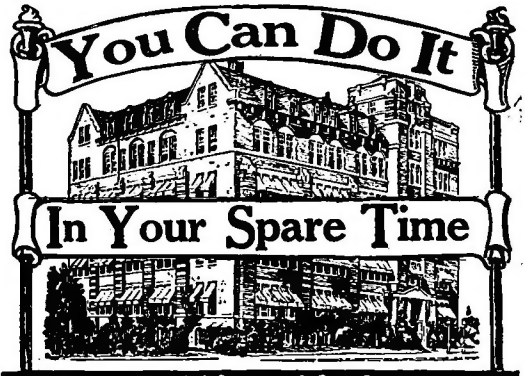

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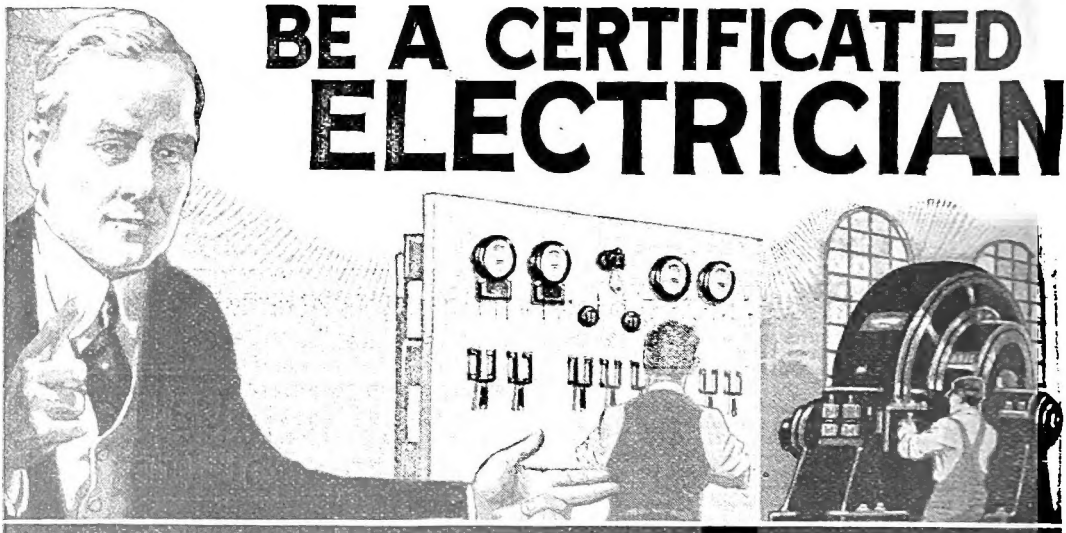

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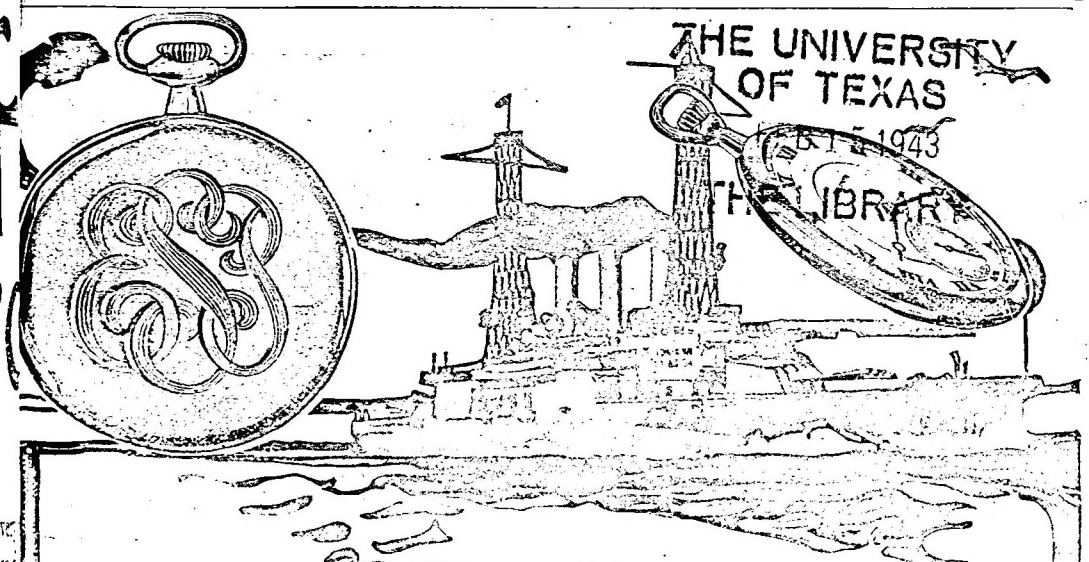

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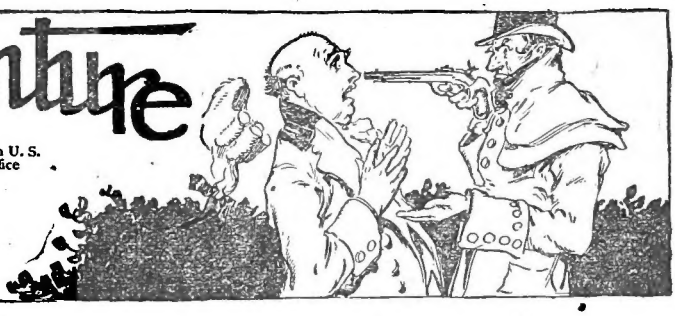

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Where Nothing Ever Happened . . . . . **W. A. MacDonald** 109

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Steve Packard discovers that even in the modern West there are circumstances under which a gun comes in very handy.

(Continued on next page)

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"Out they came, the financier patting Preston on the shoulder in a fatherly sort of way. . . . 'Come to see me as often as you can, Mr. Preston, and remember that I'll back you to the limit.'"

The Most Convincing Talker I Ever Met

Everywhere this man goes, people shower him with favors and seek his friendship. Things which other people ask for and are refused, he gets instantly. How he does it is told in this amazing story.

LET me ask you this: There is a big business deal to be put through. It involves millions of dollars. Putting it through depends wholly on one thing—getting the backing of a great financier.

But this man is bitterly opposed to your idea and to your associates. Seven of the most able men and women in all America have tried to win over this financier. They failed dismally and completely.

Now, could you, a total stranger to this man, walk in on him unannounced, talk for less than an hour, and then have him take your arm as a token of friendship, and give you a signed letter agreeing to back you to the limit?

[illegible]you?

[illegible]s done. And [illegible]ll came [illegible]our

[illegible]ed [illegible]to [illegible]e he

had become president and majority stockholder of a thriving manufacturing business rated at three-quarters of a million dollars.

Preston was deeply interested, as anyone would be over the prospect of closing such a big deal. The director in question said casually, "Why don't you run down to New York and take a shot at it, Preston?" Preston looked out of the window for a moment, and then quietly answered, "You're on."

I WENT along with Preston, simply as a matter of form to represent our interests. Aboard the 10:25 train out of Chicago, we headed for the smoker and got to talking with the crowd there.

Then I noticed something. Preston had dominated them all. Everyone was eagerly hanging on his words, and looking at him with open admiration. No sooner would he stop talking than one of the men would start him up again. And as the men dropped off at stations along the way they gave Preston their cards, with pressing invitations to look them up. No doubt about it, Preston was *THE* man aboard that car.

The colored porter, too, came under his sway. For that night, when the berths were being made up, the porter came unasked to Preston, told him that his berth was right over the car trucks, and insisted upon changing it to a more comfortable one.

And so it went all the way to New York. Everyone who met Preston took a great liking to him the instant he spoke. They seemed to be eager for his companionship—wanted to be with him every minute, openly admired him, and loaded him with favors.

Even the usual haughty room clerk at the hotel showed a great interest in Preston's welfare. He showered us with attention while a long line of people waited to register.

The next morning we called on the great financier—the man who was so bitterly against us and had

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(*Continued from preceding page*)

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Micky McMaster has sailed the seas for twenty years and is as poor as the day he started; consequently, when he hears of a rich prize drifting at the mercy of wind and weather above Hatteras, he decides that it is time for action.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off the Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

A TALE of Ancient Sicily during those brave days when crusaders from all Western Europe rushed down the Mediterranean to stem the oncoming Mohammedan invasion. The hand of the mysterious, all-powerful Mahdi is raised to strike the kingdom of Roger and open the gateway to Europe. *Lady Fulvia*, girl warrior, and *Ian Dhu* of the Scotch Highlanders, with their handful of steel-true retainers, bar the way. You follow their struggle for freedom through one of history's most breathless, romantic hours. "The Hand of the Mahdi", a complete novel by Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, appearing in the Mid-February *Adventure*.

AT NING-PO, *Partridge*, a young American, finds Chinese superstition mysteriously interwoven with a white man's plot to destroy the town. He discovers, too, that he must act quickly if he would save his own life. "Ghost-Ruled," a story by Robert J. Pearsall, in our next issue.

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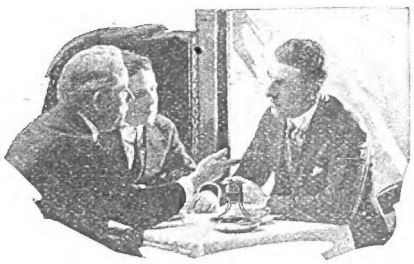
:ly turned down seven of our shrewd influential
resentatives.
I waited in the reception room—nervous, restless,
h pins and needles running up and down my
ne. Surely, Preston would meet the same humil-
ing fate!
But no! In less than an
ur out they came, the
ancier patting Preston on
: shoulder in a fatherly
t of way. And then I
ard the surprising words,
ome to see me as often as
u can, Mr. Preston, *and*
nember that I'll back you
the limit!"



At luncheon one of our directors said, "why don't you run down to New York and take a shot at it, Preston?" And Preston answered, "You're on!"

AT the hotel that night
sleep wouldn't come. I
couldn't get the amazing
reston out of my thoughts.
hat an irresistible power
er men's minds he had.
idn't even have to ask for what he wanted! Peo-
e actually competed for his attention, anticipated
s wishes and eagerly met them. What a man!
hat power! . . . Then the tremendous possi-
lities of it all—think what could be done with
ch power!

What was the secret? For secret there must be.
) the first thing next morning, I hurried to Pres-
n's room, told him my thoughts, and asked him
e secret of his power.

Preston laughed good-naturedly. "Nothing to it
I—well—that—is—" he stalled. "I don't like to
lk about myself, but I've simply mastered the
ack of talking convincingly, that's all."

"But how did you get the knack?" I persisted.

Preston smiled, and said, "Well, there's an organ-
ation in New York that tells you exactly how to
) it. *It's amazing!* There's really nothing to
udy. It's mostly a knack which they tell you.
ou can learn this knack in a few hours. And in
ss than a week it will produce definite results in
our daily work.

"Write to this organization—the Independent
orporation—and get their method. They send it
n free trial. I'll wager that in a few weeks from
ow, you'll have a power over men which you never
hought possible . . . but write and see for your-
elf." And that was all I could get out of the
mazing Preston.

WHEN I returned home, I sent for the method Preston told me about. It opened my eyes and astounded me. Just how he had won over the financier was now as clear as day to me. I began to apply the method to my daily work, and soon I was able to wield the same remarkable power over men and women that Preston had. I don't like to talk about my personal achievements any more than Preston does, but I'll say this:

When you have acquired the knack of talking convincingly, it's easy to get people to do anything you want them to do. That's how Preston impressed those people on the train—how he got special attention from the hotel clerk—how he won over the financier—simply by talking convincingly.

This knack of talking convincingly will do wonders for any man or woman. Most people are afraid to express their thoughts; they know the humiliation of talking to people and of being ignored with a casual nod or a "yes" or "no." But when you can talk convincingly, it's different. *When you talk, people listen and listen eagerly.* You can get people to do almost anything you want them to do. And the beauty of it all is that they think they are doing it of their own free will.

In committee meetings, or in a crowd of any sort you can rivet the attention of all when you talk. You can force them to accept your ideas. It helps wonderfully in writing business letters—enables you to write sales letters that amaze everyone by the big orders they pull in.

Then again it helps in social life. Interesting and convincing talk is the basis of social success. At social affairs you'll always find that the convincing talker is the center of attraction, and that people go out of their way to "make up" to him.

Talk convincingly and no man—no matter who he is—will ever treat you with cold, unresponsive indifference. Instead you'll instantly get under his skin, make his heart glow and set fire to his enthusiasms. Talk convincingly and any man—even a stranger—will treat you like an old pal and will literally take the shirt off his back to please you.

You can get anything you want if you know how to talk convincingly. You've noticed that in business ability alone won't get you much. Many a man of real ability, who cannot express himself well, is often outdistanced by a man of mediocre ability who knows how to talk convincingly. There's no getting away from it, to get ahead—merely to hold your own—to get what your ability entitles you to, *you've got to know how to talk convincingly!*

THE method Preston told me about is Dr. Law's "Mastery of Speech," published by the Independent Corporation. Such confidence have the publishers in the ability of Dr. Law's method to make you a convincing talker that they will gladly send it to you wholly on approval.

You needn't send any money—not a cent. Merely mail the coupon, or write a letter, and the complete Course, "Mastery of Speech," will be sent you by return mail, all charges prepaid. If you are not entirely satisfied with it, send it back any time within five days after you receive it and you will owe nothing.

Independent Corporation

Publishers of the Independent Weekly

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Adventure 2-3-20

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Adventure
Volume 24
Number 3
February 3
1920 Issue

*THE SWINGING MIRRORS

A Complete Novelette

By John I Cochrane

Author of "The Crimson Chamber," "Dan Wheeler, Manhandler," etc.

WOULDN'T he make a demon half-back, though?"

The two college men looked after the lightly poised figure that swung down the heaving aisle of the Pullman car.

"Notice those eyes of his—long and green—and the way he shuts his mouth? I state that I'd not care to play opposite him," continued the bigger and browner of the two.

His companion had already turned to look in the other direction.

"I notice that those two queens back there have been noticing him right along. It's a crime the way girls fall for a man that looks dangerous. Now there goes your friend Bannigan of Buffalo, on the trail after him. The gambler has been sizing up your green-eyed demon all the time he wasn't watching the girls. I'd just like to see him try to make a pick-up."

"Ho! Better not try any rescuing hero stuff, son. That Bannigan's an ex-middleweight—and not so awful ex, either. Also and moreover, it is cruelty to humans if a man can't look at two peaches like those."

The young man with the green eyes had not come to the smoking-room to smoke. He wanted a few words alone with the man who had watched him all the way from Buffalo. In a few minutes now they would reach Chicago; in the interval he proposed to find out who the man was—why he watched him. It was a week to a day since he had left that ugly huddle of clothes and flesh on the L stairs in New York. He had doubled over this route, spent two days in Buffalo and, until today, he had seen no sign of pursuit or suspicion.

Now, here was this man who had hardly let him out of his sight pushing aside the curtain in the doorway—a man of forty, but with a youthful form and rather hard face whose blue eyes twinkled with a Donnybrook readiness for fun or fight. These eyes now looked at the young man

**This is an "Off the Trail" story. See second contents page.*

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NATURAL?

YES, it's perfectly natural that the men who wrote the stories, evolved the poems and drew the pictures for the great weekly of the A. E. F., should be the ones to edit the new weekly for American men which is now being read from San Diego to St. Mihiel. Something of the same frankness and the same not particularly refined humor, which used to keep the old barracks lively after taps, has been inherited by this peace-time magazine. It is made up fifty-fifty of truth and laughter.

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squarely as their owner sat down opposite and offered a cigar.

"No? Ye don't smoke?" he asked, biting off the end of the cigar. "Ye're thinkin' it's time for a show-down."

It was a plain statement. The man scratched a match.

"My name's Bannigan—Bannigan of Buffalo. I run a roulette place." Puff-puff. "Ye can take yer hand out of yer pocket—" puff-puff— "for I was only thinkin' had I seen ye some place—in my place, maybe."

Bannigan threw away his match and again looked squarely in the other man's face.

"Besides, to tell ye the plain truth, ye have a look like ye'd be worth talkin' to, and I was gettin' lonesome."

The younger man relaxed, took his hand from his coat pocket and said quietly—

"I was in your place two days ago—to make running expenses—but I didn't see you."

The long green eyes were still alert.

"You must have known Jem Slater."

"Did I know Slater? I did that and the foul Potter that killed him. I see Potter shot himself last week, and good riddance to him. He had a right to be hung. And ye knew Slater? A squarer man never walked. We had a quar'l but 'twas my fault, and many's the time I've kicked myself I didn't say so. Ye're mighty careful f'r a young lad."

"I have reason to be."

The slight curl of thin lips showed a white line of even teeth.

"Slater was the one friend I had, beside my father."

Again the young face was cruel.

"Potter killed them both. My name is Wheeler—Dan Wheeler."

At the name, Bannigan started, missed a puff, took out his cigar and leaned forward to extend his hand.

"I'm glad to know ye. I've heard of ye."

His tone lowered with respect.

"I was braggin' I could spot a man, but this is the best shot yet, and when I shake hands I mean it. I am proud to know ye, sir."

The young man colored as he took the hand offered. Bannigan had a reputation even better than his boasts and he spoke as to an equal.

"D'ye stop in Chicago or go on?"

"Stop. Where's a good place? It's a year since I—I'm only a week out of the pen, you know."

Young Wheeler watched for the effect of his curt statement. He still sat erect and tense.

"Sure, I know! It's a wonder ye're out now, and all the time Potter knew ye were wise that he had ye railroaded. How comes it he didn't get ye pinched again, the day ye left the island?"

The man's warm-hearted directness was plain.

"He did—that is, he had it all framed."

Wheeler's tone was low, but Bannigan noted that his hand gripped the chair-arm hard.

"Yeh?"

Bannigan leaned forward farther, lips parted, cigar hanging. After a long glance from long green eyes into the friendly face, Dan went on, speaking carefully:

"He had it framed all right—a plant for theft—and had his scouts out at the railroad stations, but he wanted to make the arrest himself and that was where he fell down—on the L stairs at Sixth Avenue and Fourteenth Street—at 2 A.M."

THE cigar fell from Bannigan's lips unnoticed and he slowly leaned back against the leather-cushioned wall as he breathed—

"By —— —— !"

Then, as his eyes brightened with admiration, he hitched forward again.

"And ye got away clean! And he was strong at the hall! How the ——?"

"It was suicide. You saw the papers," Dan answered crisply. "Even the central office has let it go at that—evidently. And now that it turns out you are not a plain-clothes bull, it means that I am free for sure!" Still gravely intent, with green eyes narrowed, he added— "I am telling you this before you go any further—than shaking hands."

"Wha-a-at talk have ye?" Bannigan bristled. "Go any furder, says you!" His brogue thickened as usual under excitement. "Jawn Bannigan goes the limit at any game but if it's the kale ye need, the limit's the size of my roll!"

"Not any, thanks."

Wheeler stopped the gambler just as he shot out one leg and was diving into his trouser-pocket.

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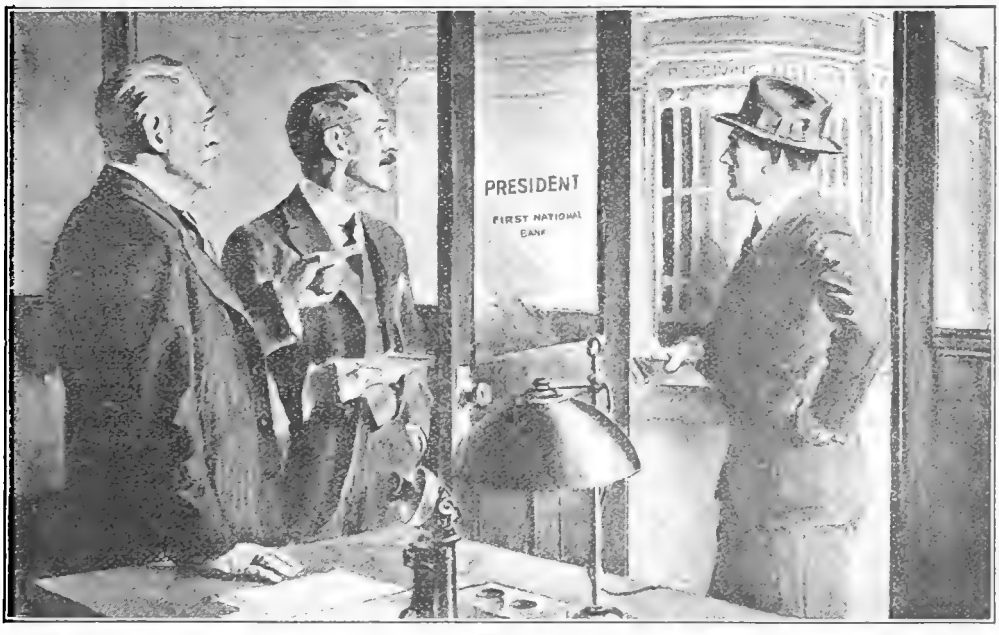

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"I just wanted you to know you were in bad company. I can get money but I was asking you for a good place to stop in the city."

"Sure ye were! I'm a —— bull-head! There's just the one place for a live member—that's The Duke's. That's where we are goin'. Wait till ye see!"

"Thanks. I have heard of it—several times, but I don't know——"

"Ain't I tellin' ye?" exploded the fiery Irishman, always on a hair-trigger. "Would I be takin' ye to a cheap dump? All the swells go there if they have any sport in them—and have got the price. Senator ——" (a U. S. senator of wide fame) "is a reg'lar guest. Where have ye been that ye don't——"

"In the pen— Blackwell's Island, I told you," he retorted crisply.

"I know it! I know it!" Bannigan thumped his own head remorsefully. "I'm a fool—an *omadhaun*. Ye can't make a gentleman out of a thick-headed Mick, an' I apologize. Lave it go at that. All the same, many a swell clubman would like to get into 'Sleepless Sim's,' an' he's not takin' in any roughneck that has the price."

"I was figuring on just that. I was saying I was not sure I had the price—until I have a——"

"Wha-a-at talk have ye?" he demanded, his voice splitting under stress. "Since when did it cost any man a penny to accept a bid of Jawn Bannigan? I know ye're used to travelin' wit men that talk different and don't tuck their napkins in their necks, but ye'll not find a better place anywhere and, if ye will come as me guest, ye'll do me proud, sir!"

For all his excitable changes of brogue there was a genuine old-school courtliness and refinement of sympathy in the famous gambler, and his was a rare charm when he smiled as he did at young Dan.

"I am glad of the chance, if there is a place to put me."

"I have it in my pocket already. I get a big two-bedded room always, so I have the two chances of strikin' one when I come in late and see three of them. That's the law of mathematics."

Bannigan's pugnacious smile had a ridiculous dimple to punctuate it, and it made him look like a lovable bad boy.

"So that's all fixed. Let's shake on it and begin all over."

So a second time they shook hands, and Bannigan got out another cigar while young Dan settled back in his chair. For the first time in a week he was relaxed and unworried, and he had somebody to talk to. In deep content he watched the outskirts of Chicago slip past in the dusk, while his new friend observed him dreamily through the smoke.

This does not mean that Dan Wheeler felt the need of talking to somebody. He was not of the voluble variety, but he was, even in his twenties, a good listener and something more—he had the unusual quality of making other people talk. That quality has never been isolated in pure culture and given a Latin name, but where you find it you find an interesting person. Dan was born that way and got worse every eventful year he lived.

Bannigan could say nothing for only a short time, so he presently thought aloud.

"And so you're the lad Jem Slater trained and traveled with, and you put in a year among the dirty crooks on the Island. It must've been plain ——!"

"It was. Never again for Dan. I'll go to the chair first," said Wheeler quietly.

"I'd not blame ye." Then, sitting up suddenly, he asked— "What would ye have done if I had been a dick on your trail?"

"This is the rear car," Wheeler answered simply. "I should have marched you to that platform—it's only just outside the door—and given you your choice of jumping, or falling off with a bullet inside. A .32 makes no noise held next to the body—almost none—just a dead thump that the sound of a train will drown. I know from experience."

Although he was looking at Bannigan, he was thinking of another man—Potter—on the L stairs—and in his green eyes there was a cold gleam.

"Mary, mother! Don't look at me like that!" Bannigan barked. "I didn't do it, d'ye mind?"

He shook himself as if cold, brushed cigar ashes off his vest and avoided young Dan's eyes.

"I wasn't thinking of you," said Wheeler.

Again his face took on the cold, lonely look.

"But you can see I am not a comfortable person to have about the house. Some day I may get human again, but you don't

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want a freak in the room with you—not now. I am obliged to you just the same."

He got up and turned to the curtained doorway.

"Will you listen to me one moment?"

Bannigan spoke with level distinctness and faultless diction, placing himself directly in Wheeler's path.

"I am always blowing up like that. That's how Slater and I fell out. But I can stop it. I've learned that I have to do it or be apologizing all the time. It was my fool fault for asking fool questions. For the last time of asking: Will ye try to get along wit an ould fool, lad? I like yer looks an' I'm always lonesome in Chicago. Have ye no bowels at all?"

"Perhaps that's the trouble, but I am glad to try if you can stand it."

"I can stand it if I can keep my fool mouth shut."

Bannigan still had a dazed look in his eyes and, as the porter came in for his whisk-broom hold-up, he still kept an apprehensive gaze fixed on Wheeler while he was being brushed. He never asked any more prying questions and in the carriage that took them and their bags to Duke's he talked hurriedly about that peculiar institution.

The look in Dan Wheeler's eyes had given him a shaking-up that had surprized and puzzled him, and he was neither the first nor the last to be surprized at the experience. It was not the color—a yellow green that deepened at times to a clear amber, shaded to almost a violet near the flaring pupil that dilated under strong feeling—but there was that in the narrowed gleam between the long lids which had a curious effect upon the beholder. Men, without exception, agreed that it made them feel benumbed—"numb" was always the word—if they met that angry gaze. Women—ask a woman who had met them what she thought of Dan Wheeler's eyes, and the chances are she would flush and answer—

"Why do you ask?"

II

"DUKE'S," "The Duke's," "The Dugout," "Drake's," "Drake's Dive"—all these names were used to indicate the large block that housed various activities. A large part of the building was used as a hotel, but there was no one office, no advertisement in any paper and no sign to indicate a public place of entertainment. There was no main entrance and no dining-hall, no place where the guests all met together. There were two excellent restaurants and two saloons on the street level; through these one gained entrance to different parts of the rooms above, and these rooms were divided into groups of varying degrees of luxury and costliness. It was unique but manifold in its character, but its distinguishing feature was mystery.

Nothing is more attractive than mystery; therefore Duke's did not need to advertise. During its short life it was known to sporting men and a very select circle of gambling men as the best place to spend or lose their money. They all agreed that it certainly furnished entertainment for man—if the man could get in. About everything else pertaining to it, there was violent disagreement. No two men gave the same report as to what the place was, and no man found it twice the same, but all were entertained in all senses of the word and to the limit of their capacities and as soon as they could get together money enough—for they generally went away relieved of their currency—they were going to go there again.

"I had just my fare back to Buffalo," said Bannigan after relating a wild tale of impossible happenings and explanations, "and that was given me by the lad that waked me in time for my train. I never saw this "Duke" Drake, or "Sleepless" Drake in all the three days I was there. I know men who tell me he can tell all about ye at sight. What's this they call them? Clairvoints? I'll bet ten to one the lad that ye speak to first when we go in will call ye by name the minute he sets eyes on ye."

"That's easy," Wheeler commented politely. "The porter on that Pullman could tell him that."

"Maybe he has done that same," said Bannigan, "but that's only a starter. Wait and ye'll see. Slater must have known about the place. It's a wonder he never took ye there. It would have been just the place for Jem."

"He would never talk much about Chicago and never stopped off there," said Wheeler. "And yet he left me a letter——"

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As he stopped himself the carriage pulled up and the door was opened.

"Mr. Bannigan," said a clean looking lad in black, "your room is ready. Will you and Mr. Wheeler go right up? This way, please."

He led the way carrying their bags through a door that was unmarked, adjoining a Chinese curio store, and up the red-carpeted stairs. Taking Wheeler's arm as they climbed Bannigan whispered:

"What did I tell ye? I never saw this lad before and he called you by name at sight. But listen! They are putting us in the swell section, with all the nabobs, so throw out yer chest an' look like a million dollars. Our room's paid a week ahead anyhow."

From the hall on the first floor a lift took them to the sixth, and in the large room where they were left by the silent young man the quiet was almost oppressive. Bannigan wrinkled his nose at the heavy furniture and tramped the thick carpet.

"Money!" said he. "Listen to it talk. It's as hushed-like as a swell church or bank —the more money the less noise. It sits on me chest. Let's go start something."

"Not for Dan. I sleep from now till noon."

Wheeler had his coat off already.

"Good luck. Here—catch!" He tossed to Bannigan a gambler's pocket-companion, a rabbit's foot.

"Don't lose it; it was Slater's," he charged.

"I will despoil the Egyptians!" Bannigan exulted. "Sweet dreams. I need nourishment and noise and I'll have news for ye when ye wake. Good night."

Left alone, Wheeler pressed a button and was surprized to find the young man at the door with ice-water in a few seconds.

"Come all the way from the office?" he asked as a quarter changed hands.

"Thank you, Mr. Wheeler. No, sir. I have only the four rooms on this corner. I stay on this floor. Anything else?"

"A good man to work for—Duke. Or is the name Drake?"

"Place pays well, yes."

The young man looked over his shoulder as he backed away.

"I never saw the Duke to know him—don't even know what his right name is. It's a queer place, but it pays not to snoop around or talk too much."

The door closed silently. Dan was left to sleep the first perfect and untroubled sleep that had blessed him since the days before he had seen the inside of a prison cell.

"AND now what'll we do?"

Bannigan beamed across the table as they finished a noon breakfast in the restaurant.

"Will we take a look at the village? There's a car strike and anarchist riots on the program if ye're huntin' exercise. I'd like to see ye in action."

"There's that letter Slater left me to a man named Brant." Wheeler felt in his inside pocket. "You say he is——"

"The big banker in Chicago, but the banks close this afternoon."

"Then why not look around this plant? It sounds like the biggest thing in sight. Where's this French friend you ran across last night?"

"Working for this Who-is-he."

Bannigan's face clouded at the mention of the mysterious proprietor.

"'Bearcat' is runnin' the big barroom around the corner and he's on duty noon till midnight. Will we go see him?"

"Yes. We may find out something."

"So this mystery stuff has got ye like all the rest. It's small satisfaction ye'll get askin' questions. No two men tell the same story. It's a part of the game to keep ye guessin'. It's always somethin' different and mostly somethin' crazy, but intherestin'."

"Like your brogue," said Wheeler gravely.

"Whorroo!" Bannigan exulted as they got up from the table. "Ye're comin' to life. I'd give me eye-teeth and me various brogue to see ye laugh wance—good and hard. But ye're on the mend and I'll pull ye through. Come on, then."

At the sight of the ridiculous dimple in Bannigan's ruddy cheek a light danced in young Wheeler's green eyes. In response a half-smile made his pale face grimly pleasant for a moment. He had been matured and tempered, not broken by the torment he had suffered in prison, and his young manhood was rising in his veins like the sap in a young tree. Youth is elastic; it has the power to rebound from a fall, and Dan was out to get what life owed him. Bannigan, watching him askance, felt a thrill of sympathetic delight.

"Ye're ripe for a scrap," he stated cheerfully, "like shootin' up another political

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clambake. But give me the signal so I can pick out a tall tree before ye begin. I've no hankerin' to spend the night in the cooler."

"Nothing like that," said Dan sharply.

The allusion to that outburst brought the memory of the island to sober him.

"No fear of cops here," said Bannigan. "Whatever is pulled off here is no concern of the bulls. Even this 'Smilin' Snead' sketch gets by without a pinch. The man that runs the ranch sure has a drag at city hall. Here is the place. Some barroom!"

It was a large and glittering bar with all the regal display of cut-glass, mirrors and ornamental bottles ever seen in such palaces, and a space for tables which were already sparsely occupied by quiet men. At the far end of the bar a large man held court. He was large of body, larger of face, still larger mouth, and the space below presented by lip and square chin suggested a vacant bill-board. The mouth itself was a long straight line, but it turned up at the ends at sight of Bannigan.

"Bearcat," said that gentleman with an air of great formality, "this is the lad Dan Wheeler I told ye about. He's as fast as the man that trained him, Jem Slater, at any game on the boards. Lad, this is Bearcat Badeaux."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Wheeler. I seen you biffore, twicet—one time in Kebec, de oder time w'en you play pokerre in open game at Jo Boeuf in Montreal. He play one great game dat time all right," he said to Bannigan. "He win from Jo Boeuf himself, and dey have a meex-up dat night. Dis frien' of yours clean out a *coureur de bois* big enough for heat him! He t'row de beg fellar ovaire his head. —— near break his neck."

Strained interest was shown by the bystanders, for praise from the great Bearcat was rare and precious. Wheeler flushed slowly. To escape scrutiny he turned to Bannigan.

"What about this new terror you mentioned, Smiling Snead? Was this gentleman the man who told you about him?" he asked with a respectful inclination of head toward the big Canadian. "Thanks, nothing but Vichy for me."

"Sure!" Bannigan lowered his voice to eager whisper. "It's the latest excitement. Some say he's a bad man from the coast, and some say he's the Duke—Drake himself—but he says he's Smiling Snead. He shows up here lately and does things ye'd think he'd be lynched for and gets away with it. That right, Bearcat?" he asked, leaning over the bar confidentially.

The big man frowned at a would-be listener and turned to young Wheeler, of whose quiet, respectful manner he seemed to approve.

"Dose is some of de stories," he rumbled. "Maybe he is de boss. I donno. Drake, he has dem spells w'en he's poison-bad. Las' time he call himself Sleepless Snead, an' he rose —— a-plenty for more as one wik. I see him den, an' he look jus' lak Drake, de man w'at hire me. Dis man look lak same fellar—call himself Smilin' Snead—an' he pull off some *sacré* bad stuff right in dis plass here! Nobody don' say one word to him! He ain't come w'en I'm on duty dis las' tam. I hope he don', me! But I ain't got any order to have him fire. It look bad."

LEANING over the bar on his elbow, the big man spoke in a whisper and here he paused to glance over his shoulder. Bannigan took the chance to ask—

"And all this bunk about never sleepin'—pure bunk, what?"

"No, sirree!" in a hoarse whisper of conviction. "Drake has got two Japs w'at is wit heem all tam—two shift', twelve to twelve, w'en he is on de house. Some fool dey say he is 'fraid in de dark. Dem Jap don' lie and dey tell me straight he nevaire sleep at night. Maybe he have dem crazy spell from lose his sleep an' drink. De two time I see heem he ack like good fellar, but dis Smilin' Snead crazeeness is de wors' yet, by gar!"

"Pardon me if I am butting in," said a quiet, bronzed man of middle age who had just paid for a drink near-by, "but I couldn't help hearing the name. There was a Smiling Snead out in the gold country. He was run out of that district some years ago, but he must have been lynched by this time I should say, although he had spells when he was almost human. Isn't it possible he may have been calling himself Drake, among other assumed names, until he broke loose and showed his real nature?"

"I give it up, me!" Badeaux shrugged his big shoulders. "Drake has been on

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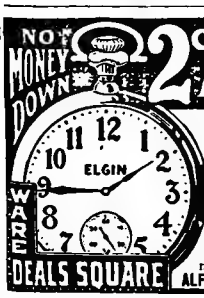

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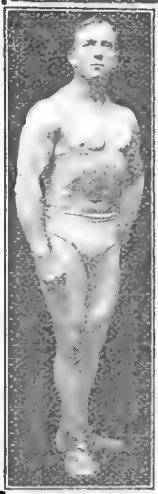

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dis town tree, four year—long enough to get a strong drag wit de main guy. No oder man but Drake can pull off dis crazee stuff an' get away—make no diff' w'at he call himself—an' no man but Drake himself can do dis jojitso stuff w'at Snead been doin'—not for one minute."

"Who said he could? You gettin' crazy, 'Bear'?" asked Bannigan.

"Some fool fellar in here yesterday, he say Snead and Drake is two man, like Hide an some oder guy, but he talk through hees hat."

"Jekyll and Hyde—he had the right idea," said the quiet stranger as he turned to leave. "Probably that's where Drake got the idea."

"Who's that?" Bannigan asked in a whisper as the man moved away.

"I donno—w'eels on his head—town full of dem. Lots of dem here for play roulette an' wil' pokerre—come from Klondike, Yukon—all de gold an' cattle countree—wit rolls as big as your ches'. Some of dem get sozzle and rose ——!"

Badeaux had a frowning eye on the entrance as he spoke.

"Here come a drunk w'at been here twice biffore."

A grotesque figure had entered and came straddling toward the rear, his broad Stetson and long frock-coat flapping. He waved his hands as he announced:

"I'm a big boomin' cyclone and I bust 'em high, wide and handsome! Room, gents, gimme room!"

"Da'ss right," said Badeaux placidly, "I got jus' de room you want."

As he pressed the button under the bar he whispered aside to his friend:

"Now you see some jojitso—a new wrinkle de boss got. I got order not to crack 'em wit my fis', but I don' laik, me."

From a door in the rear two noiseless little black-haired men appeared. Without a word or a look at any other object they darted around and behind the oncoming cyclone. That individual paused, blinked and slowly turned his head, but, before he had turned it half-way, a light push against each knee-joint caused him to kneel and, with a light, noiseless back-hand chop on his neck, the big man folded up like a wet cloth. The two little Japs had done their smooth parts almost at the same instant. They now picked him up like a wheelbarrow and slipped away silently through the dark doorway where they disappeared. The barroom was as quiet as a church.

"I agree wit ye, Bear." It was Bannigan who broke the hush. "If that's the Jap wrastlin' they talk about, I don't like it. What were ye sayin' about Drake or Snead—some crack at it, is he?"

"Ya-a-ah!"

Bearcat yawned disgustedly and wearily.

"More of dat talk—I get sick of it. W'en he's playin' Snead he t'row knife or gun, use hees han' an' foot and Jap-wrastle. He is all-roun' devil to fight any ol' way."

"Gee! I'd like to get a look at him in action."

It was a handsome college lad, sight-seeing with a class-mate, who had been listening eagerly and now spoke half-involuntarily. Now he was flushing at the looks of the group turned on him. He next caught Dan Wheeler's green eyes, and his own dilated as he recognized him. It was the same lad who, in the Pullman, had been struck with these same green eyes. For one moment they both blushed in sympathy, before they were startled by a rumbling ejaculation from Badeaux.

"*Mon Dieu!* Speak of de devil! Here he come—himself! Duck t'rough dat door behin'! He's poison-bad w'en he look laik dat an' he wan' to spoil some good lookin' young fellar—his han's or his face! Git!"

He stopped his hoarse whisper, for even this big Frenchman did not care to have the bad man hear his warning. But neither of the young men took the chance to escape. Wheeler darted a keen look at the coming menace, and the other boy seemed unable to get his eyes off Wheeler.

ALTHOUGH practically every one of the score of men in the saloon had come there in the hope of seeing the man who was entering, several of them tried to look small and to edge toward the street-door. All the impossible tales about this mysterious man of many names disagreed on important points, such as his identity, his name, his very existence, but all agreed that he was a mighty dangerous piece of mechanism.

Drake, or Snead, as his latest fancy required that he be called, looked his part. The first look into his lean, dark face gave

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one a jolt like the sudden sight of a snake. In fact, with its prominent bony jaw and chin, broad-based head and near-set, pale eyes, it had a decidedly rattlesnaky look. As he walked on sagging, bent knees his flat head, thrust forward on a long but thick neck, swung from side to side, and he smiled.

It was not a human smile. After one sight of Smiling Snead no man ever spoke the name with ridicule. It was no childish assumption of a silly name. It called up the picture of that long, thick neck with hair growing down below the collar and the empty, fierce smile, with the result that Smiling Snead became the name of a hideous monster associated in one's mind with the prehistoric creatures that terrified prehistoric man.

Smiling, leering, he approached the group at the back of the room just as the handsome college athlete turned his gaze from Wheeler's face with an effort, just in time to meet the glare of Snead's pale, whitish eyes. He had not heard the Canadian's warning, and the shock turned him white around the mouth. He stood upright, however, square-shouldered and almost in Snead's direct path.

Snead stopped, took a step aside, twisted his horrid neck for a side-glance and then his smile widened.

"We-e-ell!" He prolonged his mincing drawl in admiration. "We-e-e-ell! He-e-ere he is! Mamma's little man—all dressed up—just as sweet! Ain't he sweet?"

He had caught the wide-pupiled eyes of his victim and held them fascinated by the sheer power of repulsion and terror. Now he took his own time and enjoyed himself greatly in baiting his prey. He took two steps in the other direction, making the horrified face follow him.

"Such a pity it's the closed season for pretty boys!" he said with deep feeling. "He'd make such a lovely corpse—such a pity! But I sure would like to have one of those sweet little ears to carry in my pocket."

The room was still and not a man smiled; many were as pale as the boy being baited. It was not a bit funny, for it had as a background a record of inhuman cruelties and incredible mutilations. At that moment all these reports were probable. It was Snead's plain purpose to invite an attack. Then he would have an excuse for mutilation in which he was a past-master. For, to give a devil his proverbial due, he was an artist in maiming men and his lust for cruelty was perfect. He was a fiend without flaw.

"And the loveliest eyes," he smirked and, raising a broad, flat thumb to eye-level, he made a move illustrative of gouging an eyeball.

He crept a step nearer. He was relishing the whole scene—the stunned hypnosis of horror in every staring face, as well as the paralysis of his victim. Even Badeaux was unconsciously reaching for a bung-starter.

"Mr. Snead, I believe!"

Cool and crisp, the tone startled every man and switched each one's attention to Dan Wheeler. He had stepped directly in front of Snead, between him and the college youth, and stood with hand outstretched almost in Snead's face.

Every witness, with nerves rasped to the raw, could feel the cool daring, the pure courage in the pale face. In the long, green eyes small light-devils seemed to dance and to mock the bad man. Snead took a step back, blinked and reached partway toward a gun in his trousers-band covered by his vest.

Checking that movement on second thought, he made a quick grab with the same hand at Dan's fingers. One of his parlor tricks was to get a grip with full hand on the other fellow's finger and, with a wrenching twist, to tear loose the joint ligaments, if not the entire digit.

Young Wheeler was the quicker. With a lightning turn of his hand he had two of Snead's fingers in his grip and held him for a moment helpless, before he allowed the fingers to be jerked free.

"Who the —— are you?"

Snead's voice crackled sharply before he regained his poise of aggressive cruelty. Then, as he realized that he had lost command of the scene by the nerve of a youngster, he became stealthily crafty. He made his smile almost pleasant, for the moment, and spoke in a whispery drawl as at first.

"I don't know you, but you are a promising kid and you will bear watching."

Having got Dan's eye, he lowered his head and made an attempt to work his usual hypnotic act.

"Why ye-e-es—I expect—we—must look

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after you—ye-e-es-s-ss—I think so—Who are you?"

AT THE final roar Wheeler did not even start. He actually smiled himself, the first smile any one there had seen on his keen face. It was a wintry smile but it made him actually handsome, showing just the edge of even white teeth.

"Don't bark at me." He assumed a plaintive tone. "My heart is not so strong and you might scare me to death. My name is Wheeler—Dan Wheeler. You don't know me but you're going to."

"Yes? Isn't that nice?"

Snead rose to the occasion—himself again.

"And what are you here for?" he asked with the sweet rising inflection of lady-like conversation. "May I hope that you came to see me? Do say you did. And honest now, don't you think I have nice eyes?"

"I came here to get some of your money. I need it," Dan answered quietly.

"Going to take it—just like that! And is that all?"

Again the famous Snead smile was a sneering threat, but Wheeler, with his young head thrown back, watched him under narrowed lids as if he were a curious animal.

"No," he said dreamily, "now I have seen you, I think I shall play poker with you to get your money. Later I expect I shall have to lick you, because I can't help it and you need it."

"Why, you naughty boy!" Snead still kept his tone of girlish admiration. "So you want to beat me playing that wicked game, but you wouldn't be so cruel as to hurt me, Dan. What would all the other girls say? I think you're real mean, so there. But if I have got to be licked——"

Suddenly flashing a row of uneven, wolfish teeth and thrusting his face within two feet of Wheeler's, his long powerful fingers working at his side, he snarled:

"What are you waiting for? Why not do it now?"

"Just as you say!"

Chuck!

With the careless words Dan whipped a plain, every-day uppercut to the jutting, bony chin and Snead dropped as if pole-axed.

While the famous terror lay stunned and the onlookers stared open-mouthed, Badeaux craned over the bar to get a better look. From Snead he looked up at Wheeler, still cool but ready, and grinned a huge grin.

"Say, dat's pretty work! Why for you don' jump on hees estomac, *hein?*"

"Take his gun off him!" urged Bannigan in a stage whisper to Wheeler, "or he'll drill ye the minute he comes to."

"Bet you fifty he doesn't!" said Dan, pulling out his money. "Every cent I got—and put it up with Badeaux. Or, make it better—I bet he doesn't do a thing but tell what he will do!"

"I got you."

Bannigan covered the money in the Frenchman's hand and skipped out of the line of fire just as Snead began to get to his feet. "You better duck!" Dan hurriedly advised the college lad. "He's more likely to turn on you and do you dirt. Skip!"

The lad lingered but slowly allowed his companion to draw him away. Before he went out, however, he took one more long look over his shoulder at young Wheeler, standing, cool and careless, over the fallen Snead.

Snead moved, rolled over to his knees and hands. With hat off and on all-fours, his narrow white eyes gleaming and reddened, his stiff, dusty-brown hair growing all down the back of his neck, he looked like a huge, unclean rat. A red mark in the edge of his hair stood out, thick and purple, from the congestion of rage. By the time he was on foot he had got a grip on himself. First he picked up his hat and pulled it down over the birthmark on his temple; then he turned to Wheeler as if there were no one else present.

"Ye-es, a promising boy," he began again; "very prompt and—ah—unexpected. I thought I was looking, too. We shall finish this argument after I have got all the money you can raise—at poker—real, wild Western poker. Guns on the table, and anything goes that you can get away with, provided you have the nerve and the money. Can you show as much as five hundred, cash?"

"I will back him for three times that," offered Bannigan promptly, "and bring more than that besides, if I can sit in."

"There are several born every minute," Snead commented to Wheeler without a look toward the Irishman. "There will be

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four at the table, in a room in this block. There will be no interference by the arm of the law during or after, no matter what happens. I promise you that. Ask any man who knows, whether Duke Drake Snead, sometime of Hong Kong, Shanghai and Frisco, ever fails to keep a promise made to a man who—has struck him. Let me tell you, young Wheeler, you have started something."

With head lowered, he felt of his bruised jaw and scowled at the young man in question while the audience held its breath. No boastful and specific threat could have been half as menacing. Suspense was to be a part of his vengeance.

He cast about for something else to do that would prove how agreeable he could be as a companion or opponent. It was the hard luck of the recently suppressed drunk that he had come his senses and his breath by this time. Also, he was sobered to the point where he could walk fairly straight. He now burst through the door at the rear, much less noisy but still looking for things to happen.

"Some son'fagun pulled the—hic—pulled the floor f'm under me," he announced in dignified protest. "Pulled it pl—hic—pulled it plumb out f'm 'nunder me. 'Sall right. Thassall right'f they hadn' jumped on m' st—hic—jumped on m' stummick!" Show me them li'l' woo'chucks tha' jumped on m'st—hic—stummick!

"Never mind them, neighbor," said Bannigan cheerfully. "That was the new kind of Jap wrastlin'. It gets you in the wind and it's bad medicine. I wouldn't stir things up again."

"Huh! Who said what?" The big man turned to Bannigan. "Jap wrastlin'! So that's what they pulled on me? Wh—hic—where are them woo'chucks—? Show me th—hic—show me to 'em! No dingbusted heathen's goin' to put it all over me like that. I'll— Here! You look out!"

With the last shout he flung up his elbow and dodged as he met Snead's demon grin at short range, for Snead was sneaking toward him, head lowered and swaying, wolf-teeth gleaming in that impossible smile.

The big Westerner backed away, arms up and eyes popping in terror, shouting again and again:

"You—look out! You—look out!"

Snead crept after, faster and faster, now darting his hands about so swiftly the eye could not follow them in their bewildering movements. Of a sudden the long steely fingers clipped the wrist of his victim, he jerked him forward, tripped and thrust him suddenly back. The man struck the floor hard. Snead knelt on the body, silent and busy with his hands for a few seconds. Then the silence was torn.

The man on the floor let out a straining squeal. It rose to a shuddering shriek that shook the air, then trailed away into a sobbing groan of horror and agony—a sound from the bottomless pit that struck to the stomach and sickened the soul. Then Snead stood up and stepped back.

From the floor there rose up a scrambling thing in man's clothing, but with a distorted gray face that held no sign of manhood. It looked nothing but pure fear—a terror, shameless and sickening—and it mouthed as it strained, wheezed and grunted while the creature clawed for a foothold on the polished floor. It pawed and scrambled frantically toward the open street-door, its ghastly face twisted over its shoulder in a backward glare and then it crashed against the door-post and flopped to the floor. There it feebly clawed for one moment longer and then darted out into street where it disappeared.

IN THE barroom the silence was heavy and sticky. Two men who had stood near Wheeler went out rapidly, as if to look after it. They did not come back. All eyes but Dan's kept away from Snead, but Dan stood leaning against the bar, watching every move of the bully and his thin-lips curled in the beginning of a smile that never developed. Bannigan was white around the mouth as he turned to the bar.

"Give me that bottle of Scotch!"

As he poured he shook his head and exclaimed—

"God!"

Bearcat Badeaux was watching Wheeler. Snead looked all about him, relishing the disgust in every pale face and averted eye, until his glance came round to Dan. He stopped smiling. Something he saw in the tawny, dilating pupils seemed to set him back.

"Well?" he challenged hoarsely. "Still think you want to mix in with me?"

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"Yes; I know it," Wheeler answered calmly.

"Then you're a fool!"

"Just the same, listen!" Dan raised a leveled forefinger. "I shall get you some day—I shall get you!"

He did not raise his voice nor shift his eyes a hairbreadth from their steady glare, and Snead tried a forced laugh of contempt.

"You're not worth listening to, but bring along the cash—tomorrow night."

He had turned toward the door but now wheeled about to snarl—

"Enough to make it a man's game—and write to your folks before you show up!"

"I have no folks," said Wheeler wearily and turned his back on the badman, who swung out of the place with his teetering gait.

As talk started up, mixed with tinkling of glass, Bannigan asked the big Frenchman—

"How is it you are workin' fer such a devil as that, Bear?"

"He ain' like that w'en I see him two tam biffore. An' he ack laik anoder man nex' tam you see him, prob'bly. All de bizness he ten' to in de mornin'—an' ack like white-man—even w'en he's on a dronk. After noon he begin' dis war-dancin', an' ever-bodee keep out his way."

"Think he'll stage a Wild West poker game tomorrow night—and would he dare shoot a man right in his own place?"

"Dare? Snead dare? Ho! Don' talk to me! He dare worser dan dat. De poleece don' dare show deir nose on dis plass. But I give heem one t'ing—he don' squeal."

"How do you mean, won't squeal?" Wheeler asked one of his rare questions.

"Suppose some oder man shoot some fellar on dis plass, den Drake he see he don' get in no troub'."

"How is it you call him Snead part of the time and Drake the next minute?" Bannigan wanted to know.

"Biccause he do biznesse wit' de name Drake—sign check Duke Drake—but he call himse'f Snead on de war-pat. Jus de same, young fellar, I don' care for swap job wit' you—not any for Felix Badeaux!"

Young Dan's mouth twitched as he answered—

"I don't think I like that man and I know I don't like his smile."

He looked all about the costly saloon, then added:

"It is some place he's got here, all the same. I don't think I shall run away."

"Da'ss dead right," said Badeaux. "Dey all fall for his game—all de big fellar—an' he make a bar'l o' money."

By this time the report had been scattered that here had been a mix-up in "Drake's Dive"—that a young terror and a brand-new one had struck town and knocked down the notorious Smiling Snead—that the new man still lived, was under Snead's sentence of death and was on exhibition at the saloon. Many came to admire and to pay court and to ask the daring youth to drink with them.

From this tongue-loose tribe—they were chiefly men of some standing, real sporting men of the better class—Wheeler got a big grist of facts and fancies about Drake and his place. He listened and sifted but kept his firm lips closed as usual; very little passed between them in either direction. Also, as usual, he listened to good purpose, putting together and building up a scheme that would have surprized his companions if they could have known it.

Out of the mass of contradictions and impossibilities a few things seemed fairly certain. One disquieting rumor seemed to be confirmed: Two men had disappeared within the last week after losing all their money in the Duke's. The only reports that had gone abroad regarding them was that they had been accidentially shot in the street rioting—innocent bystanders—but it was generally understood that they were last seen in the roulette room of Drake's.

This was something new. Hitherto it had been tacitly understood by the gambling fraternity that no dirty work was to be feared in Drake's—dirty work meaning rank robbery or plain murder. It was quite *en règle* to pull off a six-gun duel, governed by the Wild West code, or real raw poker with Colts on the table, in the safe seclusion of a room up-stairs where the arm of the law did not reach. But since the eccentric proprietor had turned himself loose in this Smiling Snead performance several dark happenings had been noised about.

Dan was fervently advised to keep away from that room up-stairs. In answer to this repeated warning he spoke but one sentence, and that just before leaving the place for a walk with Bannigan. He

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quirked his delicate lips in his little half-smile as he softly murmured—

"I don't like—I do not like that smile."

At this Bannigan snorted in exasperation which was little short of hysteria, and his counselors shook their heads and swore.

III

THE roulette-room at Drake's was like many others in that it was large and expensively furnished. It had, beside the large table laid out in decorated squares on which to put and lose money or chips, smaller tables for a quiet game of draw, a glittering sideboard where one might pour his own drinks if he preferred, and the necessary box and table for dealing faro. It was unique in one way, however, not apparent to the casual eye. Like all Drake's departments, it was a place devoted to entertaining its guests, and in it nobody was permitted to be bored. If the game was not rolling high enough to interest the company, something else was sure to break, and to break the monotony.

It was here that Dan and Bannigan found that the roulette-table was not so crowded and the chips not piling so high as the standard of the place and their own anticipations required. Also it was rumored that Snead was not to appear that evening, but, before either one could express any symptoms of dullness or quite recognize it himself, there was a movement toward a far corner of the room.

"They're goin' to start some kind of hocus-pocus," said Bannigan eagerly. "Come on; ye'll never find Drake stagin' a dead one!"

They edged into a gathering knot of men about a light folding tripod on which were three walnut-shells manipulated by a moon-faced man with a smooth, rich voice. He was not asking anybody to play any such wornout games as this; he was merely lecturing on the subject and the good old days gone by.

"Dear, dear! How we used to trim them in the good old golden days." He almost sang the words and his voice was sweetly bland. "Sometimes the sweet little pea, of cork, rubber, sponge or what not, was under one of the shells. Sometimes it was under the other. More often it was between my own third and little fingers—thus—when it could be made to roll out—or appear to do so—from any shell I chose to pick up—like that. Or I could plant it where it would do the most good and illustrate the proverb regarding the mental defective and his roll of kale. Then again—in a dark hour—when the moon was not right——"

As he paused in a sad reverie, Bannigan suggested in a dramatic whisper—

"They'd catch you at it!"

"I'd hardly go so far as to say that, neighbor," was the slowly judicial answer. "If the other fellow won, he was a heeler or feeder. I was not there to enrich the native. At times I seemed careless, leaving the edge of the little pea exposed, peeping modestly from under the edge of the misplaced shell—thusly—while I turned away to answer a question."

Turning his head as he talked, he signaled to young Wheeler, who stood close by, to put his hand over the shell that showed the pea exposed under its edge. The lecturer then continued with hardly a pause.

"Immediately some smart Ike claps a hand over the fatal shell. Hah! He has the wicked gambler in his power. Virtue is about to triumph, and he is ready to bet his fool head off. You would, yourself, wouldn't you, neighbor?" he asked of Bannigan, who nodded, smiling.

"Certain-lee! Nothing more natural and human. Then comes the friend of the bright young man to his aid. He claps his own hand atop that of his friend." The lecturer signaled Bannigan to play the part. "He says to him— 'Hold on to it, kid! Hang on to that shell and we'll skin the crook.' So saying he holds his friend's hand on the shell with his one hand while with the other hand he digs up his roll of kale—and kisses it good-by. You've seen it work, old-timer?"

"Sure!" Bannigan chuckled. "But in this case we'd have you trimmed to a fare-ye-well, because the——"

"Nay, nay! Say not so!" protested the bland one earnestly. "You could not be so unkind, and, moreover, here is the pea under this one!"

"Old stuff! Forget it!" snapped Bannigan. "You just showed how you slip a pea under any of 'em, but there's a pea and you'd have to cover my money or back down, if you didn't get shot up."

"And you would even bet money on it?" The fat man shook his head sadly.

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"Any part of a thousand dollars says there's a pea under this shell!"

Bannigan's face was sharp and hard as he flashed money.

"Want to play in my yard?"

"So kind and wise and yet so crool," lamented the moon-faced one. "He would force his filthy money—the root of all evil—upon a total stranger. Is that thy fell purpose?" he asked in a deep bass voice. "Have I ever wronged thee, stranger?"

"Not yet, but I'm always huntin' trouble," said Bannigan. "D'ye want any o' my money? That's the question before the house."

"Since you will not relent, but make it only twenty dollars, say, just for a teaser. Next time, perhaps, but here's a pair of tens that never were kissed good-by. I refuse to take more of yours—this time."

"Don't blame ye fer squealin'. There's your twenty, just for a teaser, as you say. Lift the shell, kid!"

He raised his hand from Dan's and Wheeler lifted the shell. Nothing!

"And the next day it snowed," said the fat man in a voice that dripped tears.

He put his own twenty in his pocket and held out to Bannigan the two bills that he had put up.

"I thank you, friend, for playing up to me. It makes it more realistic to have both parts well represented. Here's your money."

"TRIMMED!"

Bannigan never took his eyes from the fat face nor seemed to see the money.

"Trimmed to the queen's taste, and ye could have rolled me for me wad just as well. Put me wise. Where was that —— pea?"

"Echo answers—'where?' But you know the answer, of course, your young friend, playing my confederate, slipped it on you—a smooth trick, too." Smiling at Dan, the lecturer persisted. "Please take your money."

"To —— wit the money! But where—" he turned to the onlookers in perplexity—"where the divil did the joker go to? The lad, here, came wit me an' he never moved a finger. Did ye, Dan?"

Dan merely smiled his little, slow half-smile. The fat man slowly pocketed the money and sighed wearily.

"Have it your own way, then, neighbor. Far be it from me to give the lie to a gentleman who presents me with twenty dollars. Maybe he didn't—maybe he didn't."

Once more he was idly shuffling the pea from shell to shell with a smooth quickness that looked easy, his face sad and disappointed as if he had been the victim of a joke. Then abruptly, as if at a sudden thought, he began again:

"About that exposed-joker trick, now. I beg pardon?"

He turned as if somebody had spoken to him from his flank—from the crowd now hanging breathless on his words.

Bannigan nudged Dan and called his attention to one of the shells that rested with its edge on the pea as before. Only this time he touched it with his finger, felt the pea slip back under it, proving there could be no mistake. He could feel as well as see it drop, so he kept his finger on it as well as his eyes. The fat man finished answering a question and resumed his discourse:

"It is always a plant—always, so don't waste pity on the shell-game man. If you ever do get him where the wool is short, make him sweat blood for his many sins, but never trust your eyes. Remember the joker is never where you know it is and never bet any money that it is or is not anywhere. With these rules constantly in mind, the shell-game is a wholesome and profitable form of recreation—for the other fellow."

As he spoke he appeared to be absently looking for something, lifting two of the shells.

"It's under this one, if you're looking for it," Bannigan said carelessly. "It's too bad you won't bet on it this time," he taunted.

"It is discouraging," lamented the instructor. "I am tempted to make an example of this wayward student. Here's the joker, as usual."

"That's all right," said Bannigan, hanging to his shell and watching it. "All the money in my clothes says there's a pea under this shell. If I lose I walk to Buffalo for more. Do we go?"

"He is plumb determined to give me his whole roll. Bear witness I have proved him wrong. That's a trick shell—an educated shell you've got there, brother. If you try to ride with it it will leave you

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clean as a hound's tooth. There's many a cross-tie between here and Buffalo!"

"Time was when I'd be sorry for a man that got caught at his own game," said Bannigan crisply, "and I'd let him down easy, but I play for my own hand now. Own up that you made a false pass that time, or else cover my money."

"I'd be ashamed to look in a mirror for a month."

The smile on the fat face, however, looked a bit forced.

"And what could I tell my family?"

"Tell 'em you were robbed by a crook from Buffalo. No? Then bear witness, gentlemen, I have backed him off the boards on his own——"

"How big is that roll?"

The fat man's voice was hard and cold.

"Fifteen hundred—less twenty that you have."

"There is fifteen hundred flat. Look under your shell—and thank you kindly. This, gentlemen, concludes our evening's lecture."

He pocketed the cash, folded his tripod and tucked it under his arm.

"Clean!"

Bannigan looked at Wheeler, turning his trousers pockets inside-out, his face beaming. Then he turned to the shell-game man.

"You are an artist, brother. It was worth the money and the trip to meet you, and I feel twenty years younger."

He held out his hand.

"You are a sport and a gentleman," responded the fat man, "and I am authorized by the house to tell you that you are welcome at Drake's as long as we can please you. Also, your face is good for a loan of any size that may seem good to you. We want nô man to go away dissatisfied with his entertainment. May I accommodate you?" he asked, thrusting his hand in his pocket suggestively.

"Thanks, not any. I have friends in town," said Bannigan bowing gracefully, "but how did it work?"

"A trick shell, as I said. I have not departed from the straight path of truth. See? It was made by a Swiss watchmaker. A little section of the edge, here, swings on a concealed hinge when you press the sides thus. It looks like the face of a pea when it holds up the edge of the shell and, at a touch, it folds back in place, giving the perfect illusion of a shell dropping over a pea. Don't mention it. It has been a rare pleasure to meet you. Good night!"

"Same to you and manny of 'em. Thanks. Good night. And now, kid, it's up to you!"

He turned to Dan, his eyes bright with genuine enjoyment.

"Just buck some game till you're clean o' that bit o' change and then we'll hit the ties together in the mornin'."

"It looks to me," said Dan with his queer little quirk of a smile, "as if I'd better take a whirl on my own and steer clear of advice from a man who knows too much about skin games."

"Yah-h! That was a sweet wan," said Bannigan with a grimace, "an' it was comin' to me. Well, suppose you show what stuff ye have in ye, lad. Now just play 'em as if we had to win or hit the pike, an' see how ye come out."

"That's about the size of it, so far as I am concerned."

DAN turned coolly away toward the wheel where the bets were beginning to run high, as is always the case after somebody has been cleaned or made a killing.

He began betting on the colors in a small way, so that he attracted no attention, and keeping a memorandum on a pad of the numbers that won. He did not seem to follow any simple system, but his pile of chips grew slowly.

"That'd give me heart failure," yawned Bannigan after a time.

"Not so fast as the shells," was Dan's quiet comment.

"Ouch!" said Bannigan. "Another punch on the same sore snoot."

With that he wandered away with his hands in his pockets to watch a faro game that had started at the far end of the room.

Dan kept at his dull, monotonous game, and after an hour or so Bannigan came back to announce he had borrowed and lost another fifty dollars.

"My night to howl, all right, but ye're winnin'. What's y'r system?"

"Mine? Wheel's warped," was Dan's crisp answer.

"Sure! Now I know ye're talkin' in yer sleep."

Bannigan went away to repeat his performance. The next time he came to Dan's side, Wheeler cashed in a hundred in chips.

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"There's what I borrowed. Better keep it for car-fare," said Dan.

"—— if I do! I'll send it after the rest."

Bannigan did, and the dull night wore on into the small morning hours. When it was near closing time Bannigan came back half asleep.

"Me for the hay, kid. Some pile you got!"

"Yes. Be with you in a minute—wait!"

He was watching the only heavy bettor who still played. Suddenly, as the plunger placed his last big bet, Dan held a five-dollar chip in his hand until the ball rolled low in the bowl; then he slipped it unobtrusively on thirty-four—just before the ball skipped and rattled into the stall thirty-four.

"Thirty-four—even—over—and black," intoned the sleepy *croupier*. Then, as he saw Dan's chip, he barked suspiciously—

"D' you get that down on time?"

"If you were asleep don't try to bluff it out of me!" Dan's eyes were hard as green agate.

Slowly, with a dazed expression, as if he were surprised at his own act, the man counted out the one hundred and seventy-five dollars, cashed the remainder of Dan's chips amounting to about another two hundred and then exploded—

"Asleep? Me asleep? Say, you're a bright kid, but I'm going——"

He had got up threateningly, but as Dan's eyes slowly came round to his again he seemed for a second to forget what he was doing and finished weakly—

"I'm going to tell you—you'll get yours before you leave town—you listen to me!"

"I have listened long enough to earn all I got," said Dan with a curling lip. "Take this," he said, turning to Bannigan and giving him the money and an envelope. "Put it in my bag in the room and don't let anybody in. If I don't show before seven, take it to the address on the envelope and blow the whole thing."

He purposely said it loud enough to be overheard, then lost himself in the stream of men on their way to the stairway. Watching his chance, he slipped down the narrow, dark back-stairs unseen and waited while the place emptied itself.

Two men who came last of all and all alone stopped close to Dan's head where he stood listening.

"Anything tonight?" asked one in a hurried whisper.

"Nah! Tried to trail the coon with the cash. He got out here but by the time I got to the door he was clean gone. Stairs watched too. Beats ——!"

"You're a-whistlin'! I quit right here! Cold feet all right!"

The voices trailed away; the front door closed.

A secret passage! Dan knew such things were often found in books, plays and in gambling-houses. A trick exit is useful in police-raids and at other times. Dan gave up any plan of exploring below and waited in the narrow, dark stairway.

When the front door had closed he heard a soft tread coming down the upper stairs; other steps sounded from the roulette-room and the two met in the hall just above him.

"Here you are."

It was the low voice of the shell-game man. There followed the crisp crackle of clean money.

"Fourteen-sixty. Right?"

"Like —— ! Three hundred more. Hurry up!"

It was the hoarse roulette man and he spoke too loudly. Dan carefully peeped and saw that the money in the *croupier's* hand shook slightly as he scowled at the shell-artist. That gentleman, plump and bland as usual, smiled wearily:

"Been playing the ponies again, Jerry? That kid called the turn on you like a shot. Stay away from Fannie's if you want to keep awake on the job, but don't try to put anything over on the Duke. How many times have I told you? Put on a face and come clean with him, and the chances are he will let you off entirely. But whine, or try to double-cross him, and——"

A graceful gesture, as of tossing up a tennis-ball, completed the warning.

"Easy! Oh yes. Easy for you to say it. You try it. He's the devil—and he was too smooth last night. I can't. Let me have one-fifty until next week and I'll make it two, even money," he begged in an eager whisper.

"Here are ten tens—best I can do. Don't forget it. Night."

The plump little man trotted on down the next flight while the big man put the bills in a small black bag. He closed it, slowly crossed the hall to the large mirror that faced the front stairway, looked at himself,

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fixed his tie, shook himself together and waited, listening attentively.

IN THE silence of the deserted hallway there came only the distant rattle of a cab on the pavement outside, then a few notes from a piano somewhere in the far part of the building. Suddenly the notes came louder, as if a door had opened. The man waiting in the hall with the little black bag of money stepped aside as the large mirror, together with a section of the paneled wall adjacent, swung on a central pivot. It turned through a quarter-circle and stopped, closing the corridor that had led away to the right and opening another that led directly ahead—a hallway, exactly similar and at right angles to the one closed.

When he had dodged down the dark back stairway Dan had had no definite plan beyond finding out something of the working of a gambling-house noted for mysterious disappearances, with some notion of getting a look at the owner who kept himself invisible. On the instant he moved to follow the man with the money. That individual, however, waited, as if for orders or permission to move, and a voice from beyond him asked—

"All out?"

"Yes."

"Where's the young one?"

"Went down front. Who's on lookout?"

"George. Wait!"

An instant's pause followed and then the voice continued.

"Where's the young man the Duke wants, George? D'you let him get out? You mud-headed——"

"No, sah! Ain' got by me! I come up to tell you-all he ain' come down to the doo' at all." The colored man's voice rose in alarm.

"——! Call Jerry! Where's those twins?"

Rapid, soft footsteps went away in the distance, while the man with the money stood stupidly muttering and looking about. To young Wheeler it came suddenly that he was wanted at headquarters, also that he'd better get out if possible. The appearance of the colored doorman in the farther hall proved that there was another way to the door beside the front stairs. He felt for his revolver as he moved up a step.

The man with the bag had turned his back toward him and was looking down the front stairs. Just on general principles and on an impish impulse to do something, Dan darted up the carpeted stair, planted his right fist below and behind the man's ear just as he was turning and dropped him in a limp huddle.

Nobody was in sight. The bag opened easily and a flat packet of fresh bank-notes was in his hand. He slipped it into the pocket inside his vest, snapped the bag shut and darted back to his former place in the back stairway just as padded steps came from the farther hall. The stunned man moved, rose to his knees, still holding the handle of the black bag, and then swayed to his feet just in time to stagger into the negro, George.

"Soak me, will you? You black son——"

He swung with his left. George promptly ducked, chucked his right to the stomach and clinched. The two went to the carpet, arms working to the accompaniment of grunts while Wheeler slipped up the steps and past them into the hall beyond. He had taken barely three rapid steps into this new looking-glass country when he saw to his right a steep and narrow stairway, the companion of the one he had just left, and up that, in the dim light, he could just make out a short figure mounting toward him. Up came the round black head of one of the little Japs—one of the pair whose skill in manhandling he had already witnessed.

He knew better than to rush the small wrestler, whose head never mounted above the level of Dan's knees, but, as he came to the top stair, the Jap shot forward on his stomach as if sliding to second. In Nipponese circles there are several things that can happen when your opponent gets at your feet. None of these things is nice, and to kick means to get hurt.

Dan straightway jumped straight up, lifted his feet before him and sat down on that Oriental so hard that he bounced up, standing.

He took one look to make sure the little man was flattened, heard a light sound behind him and, in the act of turning, Dan was wrapped in a heavy blanket that came from above and all sides at once. He felt his head and shoulders jerked back, his heels tripped over the prostrate body and he fell and was rolled into a tight cocoon in less than the time of the telling.

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He was roped neatly and thoroughly, so that struggles were useless, and carried for some distance before he was set on his feet and freed from his wrappings.

IV

DAN WHEELER found himself standing in a large, dimly lighted room furnished richly but with rare and simple taste. Walls, rugs and upholstery were in dull tints of bronze and buff. Books on a heavy library-table and a grand piano in the corner, with a leather couch and easy-chairs, made the place comfortable to the point of luxury.

All this Dan noted unconsciously as his eyes went straight to the man reclining in a chair before the open fire. His face was partly hidden by the hood of a monkish dressing-gown, but as he lazily turned toward Wheeler it showed—Snead. Yet Dan was not surprized. Neither did he find it startling that the man's face was no longer tensely fierce. There were the same lean features, the mark on the temple, but the whole man was relaxed and careless. It was only rational that this strange man—and in this mood Dan found himself thinking of him as Drake—must have his periods of relaxation, even if he did not actually sleep. When he spoke his voice no longer rasped the nerves; he no longer smiled.

"No hard feelings—sit down and rest. Forget what you suffered in prison and what you've done since. I'm not to blame."

Dan sat down and now he was startled, for the insight shown by those few words was uncanny. There was no answer to them, so he waited.

"You have met Snead—" was there a faint, not unpleasant curl of the lips?—"but you are now meeting Drake, so relax your muscles and we will begin over again."

He looked for no answer but, after a restful pause and without raising his voice, he called—

"Lina!"

A bronze tapestry-curtain parted, revealing a young girl in a white Grecian robe. Her beauty and slender grace seemed to bring into the room the scent of fresh flowers. Her eyes looked only at Drake, until he waved a hand.

"This is Dan, Lina," he said gently. "Look at him."

She looked at Dan, standing now and richly flushing to his hair, and faintly smiled.

The Duke looked on in leisurely content while he lighted a cigaret. When he had exhaled a long puff he went on:

"He does blush well, Lina, but he is dangerous. Please play for us, *pianissimo*, while we talk—and watch him!"

He added the last abruptly and waved Dan to his seat as the girl moved gracefully to the piano.

After a moment of hesitation, with beautiful head bowed, the girl began to play. The notes brought remembrance of the low laugh of water in sunny fields, soft winds waving meadow grasses and the call of birds at twilight. Dan felt it all and Drake noted that his sensitive lips were pressed tightly. He had meant this. Knowing the torment that the lad had suffered in prison, the bleak and bitter tragedy of his last year, he had planned this moment's appeal to all the senses of young manhood. The gambler was not only wise and wily, but also a cultured traveler and psychologist. Human consciousness was the material in which he worked, and in his way he was an artist. Presently he spoke—

"What do you want?"

Wheeler started, but Drake still looked dreamily into the fire and did not wait for an answer. He went on simply:

"You don't know. Few men do. You feel only that you must be free, but that will not be enough—for long. Soon your strength will ask for its own and will not be denied."

The man seemed to listen to the low music. When it dropped to a minor he went on—

"You—your nature—is partly made for you, partly for you to make, but in you there's a force that is rare and powerful—a force to bend or break men to your will."

A pause followed, until there came a silence in the music; then the even voice continued—

"You are a born killer."

"What—" Wheeler spoke with an effort, huskily—"do you want with me?"

"I can use you," said Drake very distinctly, "and in return I can give you, better than you can get it for yourself, what you want."

"I know as much about you," the

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relentless voice droned on, "as Slater, the man who trained you. He meant to use you to work out his revenge on—another man. He changed his purpose before he died and left you partly trained. I can finish the job to the pleasure and profit of us both. Think it over."

In the pause that followed, the girl at the piano began to weave into the low harmony she played a slow, throbbing air that repeated a too-sweet melody—almost familiar yet always just out of reach—vaguely disturbing. To Drake it seemed that his magic was working and he did not interrupt. He waited and watched the face of young Wheeler, fixed and intent, with its large greenish eyes narrowed to long green slits and never wavering from the girl's fresh young face. As if troubled by the throbbing music, the young man stirred, the tawny eyes darkened and shot some message across the keyboard to the player, who struck a discord and stopped. She passed a hand over her eyes and stood up, looking at Drake as if surprized to see him there, then whispered—

"I am frightened. Let me go!"

He nodded without looking up and she passed through the curtains with a peculiar, swift, swaying stride that was infinitely graceful and allured pursuit. Wheeler sat forward in his chair but gripped the arms and turned a steady look on Drake.

"WHO is it you want killed?"

Drake shook his head slightly.

"I said you were a born killer but I did not say I wanted a hired assassin or a butcher. There are better uses for a man like you. You probably know that the man they call 'the Assassin' is the king of all bouncers because he never has to lay hands on a man. He looks at his man; tells him to go outside, and the man goes. He has in him the power that makes man the dominant animal; you have still more of it even now, and it can be developed. You can be valuable to me at the start and I can have you trained further. It will be to the pleasure and profit of both of us and at the same time I will pay you well—in money and in things you want."

Drake was watching his man closely, but the tawny, green eyes were a baffling puzzle. He waited for what he had said to sink in. Then he made a shrewd guess at Wheeler's thoughts.

"You are not going to see horrors every day and you are not to be asked to do anything of that kind yourself. Moreover, you will find that Duke Drake is neither revengeful nor small-souled, neither spiteful nor stingy. But—" impressively—"keep away from Smiling Snead for one week! Remember that!"

There followed a long silence. Then the older man went on lazily:

"You may have noticed that nobody paid much attention to Snead—in the barroom for instance. You noticed that Badeaux didn't mix in. He was wise. I'd advise you to follow suit. That poker-game—better forget it."

He looked into the fire, frowning, and added:

"Bannigan won't be there. I'm afraid you wont see Bannigan again."

"Do you mean he's going to be another 'innocent bystander'—be found shot in the street?" Dan asked quietly.

"No," Drake sighed. "He will just disappear. But all that has nothing to do with the proposition I am making to you, and it will not last one week. You don't believe that?"

"Would you, in my place?"

"H-m. I don't know; but it's a fact." The lean face darkened and set grimly as Drake growled: "Snead's work has got to stop! If it doesn't, I shall not be here next week—nor will you!"

As he slowly swung his head about to meet Dan's steady stare, he seemed to soften strangely—almost to look kind. He lowered his tone:

"I'll let you go now in a few minutes but I want you to leave with a different impression. I think you'd better meet the 'Big Boss'—the brains behind this business. Lina!"

At the low call the girl appeared again in the doorway, and now she had a blazing diamond on her forehead, set in a gold circlet or tiara. In one hand she carried a book with one finger between the leaves. Her face looked a bit blurred by sleep.

"Is Lon Cheng in his rooms?" Drake asked.

"I think so. Shall I ask him——"

"Wait! I am not sure. What do you think?" he asked her, tipping his head toward Dan.

"He's the right one," she said looking at Wheeler thoughtfully. "Yes, he'd

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better see Lon Cheng." She was quietly positive.

"You shall see the wisest man you ever met," Drake said to Dan, rising and motioning to the girl. "Talk to Dan while I beard the lion in his den."

He left the room by another curtained doorway and the girl came with her free swing to a chair quite close to Dan.

"Do you want to be a 'hatchet-man'?" she asked abruptly.

"No! What's a hatchet-man?"

"A man paid to kill."

"I thought so. Have you lived in China?"

"Yes—a long time. Have you met—ever—an educated Chinaman? A Chinese gentleman?"

"I think not. What are you reading?"

"'Alice,' but don't ask so many questions; you confuse me." A smile followed that made Dan's heart hop, but he shut his lips tight and the girl went on:

"Chinese gentlemen don't lie. That is one thing I wanted to tell you. Another thing is that Lon Cheng is one of them and he knows nearly everything about anything. Just tell him what troubles you and he will tell you what to do. Then you'd better do it. I think that's all I can tell you right now."

"Do you stay here all the time?"

Dan seemed to be recovering rapidly from his embarrassment.

"And what do you do when your father—is he your father?"

"No—yes—I mean we travel a lot. This place runs itself when my father and I are away. Lon Cheng is the real brains of it, as father told you."

"What do you do when your father goes on the—when he is Snead? Is he a Jekyll-Hyde combination, or two men in——"

"You ask too many questions."

She frowned but her eyes were wide and bright.

"Some time you will know my father better. Here they are. Good night."

"Good-by."

She shook her head, smiled over her shoulder and was gone.

Drake held aside the curtains and in the doorway appeared a tall and dignified Chinaman. His smooth face was serenely bland, and his hands were crossed in the silken sleeves of the Chinese coat he wore. His presence filled the room with the leisurely calm and mysterious wisdom of the ancient Orient. He spoke perfect English in a voice as smooth as his silken robe—

"MR. DAN WHEELER, it is a pleasure to meet you."

He bowed with a slow and regal grace, keeping his hands in his sleeves.

Dan was on his feet and blushing again. This seemed to please the big man, who sat down in the chair the girl had occupied. Drake sat behind and to one side of him where he could watch Wheeler's face.

It seemed to the young man that there was no use in trying to tell the Chinaman anything because he literally knew it all beforehand, so he waited for him to speak.

"You have had trouble lately and have suffered in prison," said Lon Cheng. "But don't let that spoil your life, which is three-fourths in the future. You have been taught a little but have much to learn. The man who taught you some of the wisdom of *Yawara* or ju-jutsu, Slater, was taught by a pupil of mine. You would find the life here, with Duke Drake, satisfying. You would learn much that you want to learn and you are fitted for it by nature. But—" he was regarding Dan dispassionately— "you have other plans."

"I want to get out on the plains—live where there's lots of room—for a while." Dan heard himself saying the words without surprize.

"That is natural and wise," was the calm answer. "It will freshen your young blood—put an edge on you. But meanwhile, while you are making the necessary arrangements, you might better put in a few days under our roof."

With a startlingly young and attractive smile and a gracious inclination of the head, the Chinaman rose and turned as if to leave.

"But he has promised to play poker with Snead, up-stairs, tomorrow night."

It was the girl, again standing in the doorway, who had spoken. To her Lon Cheng bowed.

"Good evening, princess. In that case he must keep his promise."

"But——"

Drake started to protest, but Lon Cheng stopped him by a wave of a smooth white hand as he looked at Wheeler once more with a smile.

"He is a most active and unexpected

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young man, and where he is there will always be stirring events. As to this game of poker, I must take a hand myself."

"Fine!"

The girl clapped her hands, flushed and dropped the curtain.

"We shall meet again," Lon Cheng said to Wheeler. "I shall look forward to that meeting with pleasure. Good night."

With another courtly bow that included both men and the curtained doorway, he slowly crossed the room and passed through the door without even a silken rustle of his garments or a flop of his long straight queue.

"That's something for you to remember while you are hesitating. There goes the one great master of ju-jutsu in this country, and a magician.

"And now—" rising and throwing his cigar into the grate, Drake tied the cord of his gown—"it is getting toward morning. I will show you the way to your room. It is only a few steps. Follow me—not too close because it makes me nervous."

He led the way with a step that showed the trained athlete in spite of a slight sag on one foot as if the leg were short. Wheeler obeyed, except that he kept rather close behind, intent and alert.

It was hardly to be expected that this man could forgive or forget the blow struck in the barroom, and there was the packet of bills in his own inside pocket. Perhaps the loss had not been reported, but Dan had already learned to depend on his own instinctive feelings when it was a question of personal attitude toward an opponent. Yet he was puzzled by an entire lack of the feeling of antagonism between himself and this dangerous man. Nevertheless, the man who could be a repulsive fiend with a lust for torture, yet take a knock-down smiling and within twelve hours talk to him with genuine kindness and startling wisdom, might be able to control himself to any further extent—might still spring a trap that would drop him into the bowels of the earth.

However, after turning two corners and passing along as many corridors, his guide brought him to his own room.

"Here you are. Don't worry about Bannigan. Those stairs lead to the door where you first came in. See you tomorrow. Good night."

A few steps on the thick carpet and a turn in the hallway and he was gone, and there was not a sound to break the small-hour stillness of the place. Dan stood, hand on the knob, for a moment to listen.

"Crazy place," he muttered and opened the door.

There was a dim light burning in the room and in one of the single beds lay Bannigan, sleeping peacefully. After listening to his quiet breathing a few moments, Dan looked about the room and remarked to his image in the mirror:

"Somebody's crazy all right. Now what sense was there in lying to me about Bannigan? And what about the cash I picked out of that bag?"

He locked the door and took out the packet of bills. They were fresh and almost new— all twenties. He counted twenty-five—five hundred dollars. In his own roll he counted ninety-five dollars in bills, and he had given Bannigan three hundred to keep for him—the stake he had won on No. 34. Not so bad, he felt, if it stayed with him until he could deposit it.

He had a perfectly good plan. After he had seen this thing through—he didn't like that smile of Snead's—he would bank about a thousand dollars for an anchor to windward. Then he would get out on the plains, ride a horse, get brown and husky and get to throw a gun with the best of them. Then he would see. As to Drake's proposition, it wouldn't do at all if Drake was to have these Snead-spells right along. He had a daughter, but—no—he couldn't see it. And these stage-magic tricks—swinging mirrors that looked like corridors. He was too sleepy to follow further.

Now, about this money? Of course somebody had pass-keys to all the rooms. He looked all about the room and finally slipped the packet of fresh bills behind a picture of Napoleon that hung on the wall opposite his bed. The smaller roll he left in his trousers pocket. Tomorrow—or today—he would take that letter Slater had left him to the big banker—Brant. Brant would know.

He got into bed and dreamed he was playing marbles with Snead for an agate shooter. Snead won it and, as he pocketed the agate, he said impressively:

"Your nerve's no good! Sleeping does that—bad habit!"

Sleeping the sleep of youth, Dan waked

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at 1 P.M. to find Bannigan gone—clothes, bag and all. On the dresser he found a good gold watch and a note on an old envelope:

Back to Buffalo for more cash. No poker game for me—this time. May be back next week. Here's your money—all but fifty. Keep the watch.
Good luck. JOHN BANNIGAN.

Only the money wasn't there. Also the roll of ninety-five was gone from his clothes nothing left but small silver—two-thirty in all. Behind Napoleon at St. Helena, however, was the packet of yellow-backs. These he divided in three packets of eight each, putting the odd one in his change-pocket, and stowed them away—one inside his vest, one in his bill-fold and the other folded in a newspaper in the bottom of his handbag.

Having done this, he felt that he was about square with the game—or with the house—with a gambler's percentage in his favor. His conscience, therefore, was as good as his appetite when he locked his bag and took it with him down to the restaurant. He had decided to go by the railroad station, on his way to see Brant, and check the bag at the parcel-room, for in the back of his mind was the possibility that he might want to leave town without coming back to Drake's again.

V

THE Nth National was the big bank of the city and Eli Brant was the man who ran it. He also ran other things—so much so that there were those who said he ran the city. He sat in his office off the board room behind a huge flat-top mahogany desk with nothing on it.

He was big and broad himself, big of face, broad of shoulders and mind, deep of chest and of feeling—in all ways built on large lines. His face—strongly and darkly handsome—was still fresh, still held some of the color the boy Brant had brought from the Vermont farm, and when it lighted with his rare smile it showed teeth white and firm. When he spoke, it was in a deep and quiet voice. The whole man breathed the quiet of power well controlled, the quiet of repression.

Many men came into that presence every day—some to bluff and give in with surrender—some to wring their hands and sweat blood—some to pray and weep, for, in that presence, all varnish and veneer has to come off and things show up raw and naked. But the man who entered with honest purpose and despair in his heart often went forth with a spring in his step and a clear light of hope in his moist eyes. No man had ever entered that room who could sit as still or see real things as clearly as Eli Brant. That was why he sat alone in his regal power and moved men and things over a wide empire.

He was sitting in this richly plain office on a day as busy as all his days when, in a slack after-dinner hour, there was brought to him a worn manila envelope. On it in a fine clear hand was written—

To Eli Brant from Jem Slater. Introducing Dan Wheeler.

The banker's face showed nothing, but he did not speak for five seconds after reading. Then he said softly, as always—

"Wait five minutes; then show him in."

He did not stir a muscle until the clerk had silently vanished; then he unlocked a small drawer and took from it a part of a photograph torn in half from top to bottom. Then he opened the envelope and took from it a written sheet of paper and the other half of the torn photograph. First he read the letter:

Dear Buck: By this time you may want to put the pieces together. I do. If you feel the same way about it, be good to Dan. Once more I am,
"SLICK."

With a queer droop to his long mouth, the banker put together the two pieces of the picture and looked at the two college boys in the clothes of a generation ago—"Buck" Brant and "Slick" Slater—standing side by side, their arms over each other's shoulders. He could smile at the quarrel that had separated them, but at the time it had been a tragedy that seemed——

A light step sounded at the door. Brant looked up at a young man whose long eyes caught his attention at sight and who moved with a peculiar gliding step. As he came nearer, Brant's skilled glance noted the athlete's ease of movement, the clear pallor of the Grecian features, the face that would hardly be described as handsome because of the merciless fine lips and the disquieting gleam in the strange amber eyes. They were level and large, but in their steady

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gaze the deep pupils seemed to vibrate with a masked and smoldering fire and at times one could almost see little devils in their depths—bright little devils all a-dance with surplus devilment. The firm, slightly cupid-bowed thin lips never smiled nor smirked.

The big banker missed none of this, and he saw no sign of unripe hesitation or weakness. Here was a youth that roused him—put him on his mettle. That was why he made no move of welcome and did not even wave a hand at a chair. He waited to see if this young man would show assurance by sitting down unbidden, or make some unneccessary remark to relieve the tense silence.

He did neither. He stopped before the big flat-top desk and stood still—really still. He neither twirled his hat nor shifted his weight, but looked Brant in the eye and waited.

"You are Dan Wheeler?" the banker asked at length.

"Yes, sir."

"Sit down, please."

When Dan had taken the client's chair in a strong light facing Brant, the banker continued deliberately:

"I know something about you. Slater wrote me one letter the day before he died." As Brant paused, Dan stated simply—

"He was killed—poisoned."

"So I learned. I had the matter investigated, but the man, Potter, had too much influence in New York to be brought to justice."

A pause followed. Dan still waited and Brant went on more easily:

"Slater seemed to have a premonition—anyhow he wrote me the day before he was killed. He said that Potter was going to 'get him', that Potter and his gang had already ruined your father, who was near his end, and that you would be left with no money and no friends who could protect you from the same gang of crooks. So he was going to send you to Chicago with a letter to me. That was a year ago. I had private detectives on the trail, but they could do nothing, with the gang against them—not even trace you—so I concluded they had got you, too. Where were you?"

"In the pen."

There was nothing plaintive or indignant in the plain statement.

"When did you get out?"

"Ten days ago."

"And what were you put in for? You were framed I suppose—railroaded on some trumped-up charge."

"No, I shot up a shore-dinner of the gang's. I deserved a longer bit for not hitting any of 'em."

The thin lips quirked engagingly and the banker's mask cracked. The stern face lighted with a boyishly frank smile. A flash of understanding passed between them, but both faces darkened as Brant said slowly—

"I suppose Potter saw to it that your stay in the pen was pleasant."

"All of that," said Dan grimly.

"And when you got out, how——?"

Brant was stopped by the look in the tawny eyes.

"Do you want the whole thing—just as it happened?"

Something in the hoarse tone and the sudden stiffening of Wheeler's lips made the banker say quickly:

"No! I can see how it was. It was your life or his, and you had been tortured. I should do the same thing, if I could. Shake hands and forget it."

"Thanks."

DAN'S eyes softened and moistened as he took the big, honest hand, but his mouth never lost its cruel lines as he said roughly:

"But I'm not doing any repentant stuff. I'd do the same thing again and enjoy it. It feels good now. When I think of it I can feel that gun in my hand—feel the lift of the shot and the heave of his fat body. It feels good."

Dan's tight lips showed a white line of clenched teeth.

"Stop it! For —— sake, man, don't think about it!"

Brant had raised a big hand before his face, palm out, to shut out the sight. Both men sat in silence for a time.

"You are free now, with no suspicion or evidence to follow you," Brant said kindly. "Don't think I want to preach, but do you know there is such a thing as blood-lust—a passion for man-hunting and man-killing?"

"I have been told so times enough."

This was put in so quickly that it amounted to an interruption, and the banker sat up as if he had been prodded.

"Well? Do you know that, once started and branded 'man-killer,' there will be no

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peace, no content for you here or—but I said I wouldn't preach."

"That's what I came for," Dan answered promptly.

"Will you say that again?" Brant asked quietly after an incredulous pause of some seconds. "I don't think I heard right."

"Not preaching—advice. I can get money myself, but I have few friends—none that count. As I said, I can get money, and that means friends of one kind, but it isn't the kind I'd go to for advice. I suppose it may be because I am homesick or lonesome."

"God!" said Brant half under his breath.

It was not an oath or of profane intent. The big heart of the man was touched to its depths by the dispassionate statement of this youth, who was no more conscious of being pathetic than a young jungle tiger with a fresh-slain lamb inside him.

"But I don't feel sick," Dan half communed with himself. "I'm spoiling for a scrap right now. What I really wanted to ask you—" he addressed Brant once more as if answering the question for the first time—"was where I could get a job cow-punching with a good outfit—to get into condition after being shut up so long."

"What you want is folks," Brant said emphatically. "You need to have decent, kindly folks with children and troubles of their own. You need to learn that most folks are a decent sort and that they will do you a good turn. That reminds me of what I want to know about you. Now we have got down to brass tacks, are you going to start square, with an honest job and a will to make something of yourself? Or are you out to get even with the world for the raw deal you've had? Do you want to work or get something for nothing? Do you want to earn an honest living or gamble for big stakes?"

"I just told you I wanted a job but——"

"That's dodging," Brant interrupted. "After you get into condition—then what? Do you want to learn cattle-raising or gun-throwing?"

"Isn't that a fool question?" asked Dan impartially. "If I did want to learn to use a Colt better than any living man, to be a famous gunman and highwayman, I'd lie about it, wouldn't I, in order to get what I want?"

Brant laughed outright.

"That's one on me. But Dan, look me in the eye! Which is it?"

"I never did like to sweat—every day," said Dan soberly, "but—Mr. Brant, will you look me in the eye and tell me what was your idea of fun when you were twenty-one?"

This time the banker did laugh and make a business of it, while Dan sat looking slightly bored after the first half-smile. Brant was still chuckling when he said:

"That did me a world of good. I can see that we should get along together fine, Dan."

"I knew that all along," said Dan calmly. "And about the cow-punching job——"

It is a matter of record that Eli Brant spent the rest of banking hours that day talking with the waif he had taken in out of pity, and that he cut very short messages sent in to him by big business. It was a fact that these two men, so different in many ways, were rarely congenial—strangely alike in their perfect fearlessness and fighting force, in steely nerve and the love of long chances. When it came to closing time, Dan got up, flushing with embarrassment and the pleasure of the man-size talk he had had, and said:

"Well, Mr. Brant, if you owed Slater, as you said, you have paid the debt today with interest. It will be something to remember."

"And now school's out for the day, what'll we do next, Dan?"

Dan got up and seemed not to have heard him.

"There's time before supper—we've got to call it dinner these days you know—to get 'Buck' and drive around a spell before we go home."

"But, Mr. Brant, you don't want—I can't——"

For the first time Dan's speech had a hitch in it, but Brant put a hand on the younger man's shoulder and walked with him into the board room. He spoke casually:

"You can tell Pat where to get your bag and he'll fetch it. Your room's ready. You and that six-foot kid of mine will make a team, but the girl has the brains."

"Wait!" said Dan hoarsely, twisting from under the heavy hand as they went through the empty board-room. He turned his back to look out of a barred window. "You don't want a crook in your home—a—man-killer and ex-convict."

"No you don't! You're bashful, that's what's the matter, and your neck is red as

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a boiled lobster. You coward! Brace up—I hate a quitter!" Again the hand was on Dan's shoulder. "Honest Injun, Dan, I want Buck to know you. Do you both good—and I'm proud of my boy."

There was no escape from such kindness, and the big man tactfully waited for Dan to get a grip on himself. He did not have to wait long.

"All right, I'm the horrible example," said Dan, turning about cheerfully.

"Ring up the curtain."

"Good boy! Come ahead. Buck ought to be out in front now."

LEADING the way into the front room outside the gilt fence, Brant called—

"Oh, Buck!"

A big, athletic-looking boy was talking through the cashier's window, under fire of envious glances from all the clerks who were closing up. In all points that please the eye he was an improvement on his sire, but there was a suggestion of finer fiber, and his voice was singularly low and soft as he answered—

"Here, dad!"

Dan knew from his reading of the newspapers that he was to meet the famous plunging half-back, "Buck" Brant, but he was not prepared to see the young man of the Pullman car and Drake's barroom. Nor was Buck expecting to see in his father's bank the "demon half-back" he had admired on the train—the dangerous-looking chap who had saved him from humiliation only the day before.

"What's this blushing match all about?" Brant senior asked as they shook hands. "Lost your voices?"

As he turned to give directions to somebody, the youngsters stepped out of earshot.

"That father of mine," said Buck in his velvet voice, "he didn't see fit to tell me who you were, but this is bully. I have wanted to meet you."

"I'm a sort of amateur crook, just out of jail."

Dan cut off his words as if they hurt but looked straight in young Brant's face for signs of recoil. Instead, the handsome flushed face lighted up eagerly.

"Are you Dan Wheeler? Wow! This is too good to be true. Dad has told me about you—he really tells me things—and I have been wild to know you, but I'd guessed you were the fellow that busted that devil, Snead. I must tell Dad that. I was scared petrified. And now we'll have a chance. You're staying with us, of course?"

"Your father asked me—" Dan was about to protest.

"Bully!" Buck's delight was explosive. "Excuse me. I forgot to tell dad——"

Affectionately pulling his father away from the wicket toward Wheeler, Buck explained to him—

"I forgot what I came to tell you, dad, when you sprung on me." At the name, Buck looked as shy as a girl. "But Jack Elwell has come. He's up at the house all alone. 'Jam' is out shopping with Kath Munson and I expect they're at Munson's by now. They walked, and there've been windows smashed right around this afternoon. It's not safe. There was a mob of rioters in front of Meadows'—and on the avenue when I came down. We'd better drive that way and pick them up."

"Then you boys can do it. I need the air. I'll walk home the short way."

"No, dad! I tell you the mob is nastier-tempered than ever. I can't let you go that way alone. We——"

"You can't—you—I'll spank you presently, young man. You take care of your own precious hide and don't let Jam or little Danny here get hurt!"

With that the big man was off down the granite steps and up the broad street.

"I haven't got him very well trained," Buck told Dan as they went down the steps where the carriage waited, "but he's the only dad I've got, and it is not safe." He looked after the erect figure, frowning.

"And you can't get another like him," Dan said slowly. "They don't make 'em that size. He's worth looking after."

"I believe you. These anarchist and striking mobs are getting worse every day, but if he sees us after him it will make him more determined to walk, and I am worried about those girls."

"Why not shadow him?" Wheeler proposed. "Tell your driver to keep out of sight and pick up the girls, and you and I will trail your father. I am used to this sort of thing. It's easy if you know how."

"Sure! I know I'd rather have you along than a regiment of cavalry. Pat—" he turned to the big Irishman who was holding the span of dappled bays—"drive round the block to the avenue and take the girls home.

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Dan and I will follow dad on foot. He'll be mad if he knows what we're up to. See any rough stuff on the way down?"

"I did that," said Pat. "There's a sweet smellin' bunch av dagoes an' sourkrouts in the alley by Meadows' Store, yellin' an' wavin' dir-rty r-red rags. Gettin' up spunk to break some glass or trow bricks at wimmen."

"Then don't lose any time and don't get into a mob yourself. If you see one in the way, go round the block. You got to get Miss Jam, you know."

"But, Misther Buck!" Pat stopped the younger Brant as he was starting. "Thim gir-rls were goin' into Meadows' whin I came by. Mr. Meadows himself an' his gir-rl was wit' 'em, and he'd not let thim out while there's throuble doin' outside. Why wouldn't I lave the bays at Turner's stable an' come wit' ye? Whin we get the family bunched I'll take thim home—all of yez!" Pat was volubly eager and pleading. "If anything breaks loose I'd not want to be missin' it. Please, Misther Buck!"

"All right," Buck decided suddenly. "Meet us at the corner beyond Turner's. Hurry!"

The bays were already off at a run, scattering pedestrians to the curbs.

"This is luck," Buck said as they set off swiftly. "What are you going to do this Summer? I wish we could be somewhere together."

"Your father thought I could go back to his Texas ranch with the boss. 'Uncle U,' he called him. I want to learn to use a Colt."

"My glory! Such luck can't be healthy," said Buck soberly. "That's just the program dad and I had fixed for me. Something is sure to happen to us. Would you mind walking in the middle of the street where a brick can't fall on us? I'm superstitious. But talk about shooting, Uncle Uri Greylock is the man that invented the game. Where did that boy Eli go? Did he step in a coal-hole?"

Buck was staring at the street ahead where his father was no longer to be seen.

"He stepped into that corner cigar-store. I haven't lost him for a second. Is there an entrance on the next street?"

"Yes, on the cross-street, and Meadows is on the avenue just across, one block over. Pat ought to be around here about now. We'd better move."

They made the corner on a run, turned it and ran along the narrow cross-street to the avenue corner. As they approached the corner, Pat crossed the street before them, coming down the avenue, and he waved them on, shouting.

"Come on, lads! They're at it! Listen at that!"

The tinkling crash of breaking glass came from the big department store diagonally across.

"Wurr-ra-Whoosha! It's thim——arny-kists, an', praise Mary, here's a brick-pile! Lave us take two apiece an' bounce thim off the dir-rty heads av thim, so's they'll know we're comin', d'ye see?"

AN UNKEMPT crowd was heaving and jabbering before the plate-glass front where a brick had just made a jagged hole. A few red rags were in evidence, but the bulk of the crowd was made up of loafers out for anything in the way of amusement or plunder. One or two were reaching for some silks draped behind the broken show-window.

"Don't mix in without reason," Buck warned. "The cops will be along in a minute and the girls must be safe inside. Dad is somewhere behind us."

"There's a uniform bull now," Wheeler coolly noted. "He's hustling some women out at the side-entrance on the cross-street." Buttoning his coat to the neck, Wheeler continued: "And there's a bunch headed for them—real yeggs and poke-lifters. That means trouble."

About a dozen real sneak-thieves and thugs, following the crowds for any loot that offered, were bearing down on the well-dressed women shoppers in the side-street. The lone policeman stood his ground like a man, blew his whistle and drew his Colt, but he was dropped from behind by a piece of lead pipe wrapped in a newspaper.

In an instant the huddle of screaming women was surrounded, hustled, their purses and hand-bags snatched, and then came an interruption.

Wheeler had sprinted for the field of action without a further word, with Buck and Pat at his heels, and now landed in the thick of the festivities.

"Watch out for the little lad!" Pat had cautioned Buck as they ran.

"Little nothing!" Buck shouted back. "He's the original——"

Just then he got a glimpse of his sister's

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hat in the mix-up and tore in for a whirlwind finish.

Dan did not aim at the center of gravity of the bunch, but at its margin. Using the momentum of his run, he caught a big bruiser by the wrist and swung with a whirl that rolled the man half across the street with a dislocated shoulder. Landing on his feet like a cat, he sprang for an upraised club, missed it, landed squatting and jumped with a lifting drive that caught a dirty chin and put another yegg to sleep. He was then assailed on three sides, which was what he wanted.

To the ju-jutsu student of mob-fighting the best offense depends on being attacked. You make the other fellows do things to themselves. A thug launched a kick meant for Dan's stomach. Dan awkwardly jerked a bent knee crosswise in front of him, and the kicker rolled into the gutter yelping and hopped off on one leg. Another came, arms wide for a clinch, and reeled back pawing his face and screaming that he was blind, which was true for that moment. A vicious slicing chop with the hand-edge under the ear dropped one more.

Here Pat forged abreast working like a side-wheel steamboat. He was using the orthodox straight-from-the-shoulder piston-drive of our fathers. With each joyous and earnest punch he landed, he let out an explosive "hah!" like a chopper on a log. Pat was having a lovely time, but it was at the very height of the revels that he saw a black-haired chunk of a man jump on Buck's back and get busy with his hands at Buck's neck. He could not get to him in time, but roared approval as Dan dropped another man at Buck's side.

"Good lad! Sound Danny, me boy! Hah! Soak the monkey! Hah! On the lad's neck! Hah! That's the boy! Hah! Oi-wurra wurra! He's down!"

Just as Dan dragged the monkey from Buck's back, he saw a thick stick land on Buck's head and drop him. This time Dan got both hands on the stick at the ends, wrung it free, dropped the holder with the same twist and, landing astride Buck's body, began to use the weapon bayonet-wise with savage force and precision.

And here all men take notice. The end of a cane or club, driven bayonet-fashion with both hands wide apart, into a man's mid-section, is the prince of all weapons in gang-fighting.

Within a space of five breaths there was a cleared space about Wheeler where he stood over the prostrate Buck, a space ringed about with toughs doubled in the middle, some of them spitting blood.

Already the adventure seemed to have lost all attraction for the gang when the hoarse cry arose:

"Police! The bulls! Hunker!"

A CLATTER of hoofs, a scattering of furtive dark figures that dodged in all directions, and on the battlefield there were left only the scared women and the tableau made by their three rescuers. Wheeler stood astride Buck for one moment, green eyes flaring as they followed a fleeing band of three who ran together, and balancing his stick in one hand. Then he bent to help Pat, who was kneeling over young Brant. A girl darted from the huddle and knelt at his side. She raised his head.

"Is he killed? Oh, what is it? He doesn't breathe. Is he dead? Can't you do something?"

By instinct she made her frantic appeal to Dan, who had reached for Buck's wrist and now suddenly pressed his chest. The result was a long indrawn breath with a catch in it.

"He's all right." Dan was examining the bloody slit in the scalp and making a strip of his twisted handkerchief. "Give me your handkerchief!"

He made a pad of her little wisp of linen and bound the cut with his own. He tied it firmly and deftly. One of the officers brought water, and, as he got up from his knee, Dan said:

"He will be all right in a few minutes. It's his wind more than the crack on the head. Somebody gave him the first part of a pneumogastric jab. Put him on his feet!"

Pat took the other side and helped Buck to stand erect. Even then it was hard work for him to breathe.

"All right—minute," Buck gasped. "Only —feel—tied."

"Thank Heaven!" breathed the girl reverently. "And no wonder you feel tired. Were you with him?"

She still spoke to Dan, disregarding the chattering sympathy of the other women.

"Yes," he replied blushing. "He said 'tied' and that's what he meant—like a rope around his chest. It will last an hour perhaps and then he'll be as well as ever."

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"Am now," Buck protested with a gasp. "Jam, this Dan—Dan Wh-ic— Dan Wheeler." He forced a big breath and shook himself loose. "I can walk—'s well's anybody!" He grinned at his own noises. "Dad—think I'm soshed—go get 'im, Pat."

After Pat had departed muttering, Buck asked, as they walked away from the staring crowd of the curious—

"What happened—after I was—knocked silly?"

"Mr. Wheeler just naturally cleaned out the rest of them," said the girl. "It was lovely. They'd come at him to eat him up, and then things would happen to them—different things that made them howl and roll around on the ground. And he, Mr. Wheeler, didn't stir from his Colossus pose over your body. After he got the stick it was all over but the shouting and the mounted squad got there just in time to do that. It looked easy, for Mr. Wheeler——"

"Name's Dan, I told you," said Buck.

"Glad to know you, Dan." The girl held out her hand. "It's time we shook hands. I'm proud to shake hands with a fighter, Mr. —Dan"

"It was easy," protested the suffering Dan through his blushes. "Just some of those Japanese tricks like the one that put your brother out of business, Miss Ja—er——"

"Just Jam—short for Jammery—kid talk for Jane Mary," she explained carelessly. "Call me Jam, for you're going to be one of the family. Here is dad. Take the back seat, Buck, and do the wounded hero. I want to sit beside a man able to protect me."

The smile she gave Dan as she got in beside him made that young man dizzy.

"That's the second time you've saved my life." Buck was getting his breath fast and spoke to Dan seriously. "I'm superstitious, as I said, and I hope the third time won't be the worst."

"I fail to see any joke in this," Brant senior put in.

He lived in and for his only boy, and he looked whiter about the mouth than Buck, even. He was anxiously watching the boy, and it was plain that he had suffered a severe shock or was deeply worried about something. Having made sure that Buck was not much hurt, he was moodily silent all the way home, while the younger generation kept the talk going.

"What did you do to those men, Dan Wheeler?" The girl turned to him with genuine interest. "I was watching you and Buck, and even before you got that stick you put four big men out of the game awfully fast. What was it, brass knuckles?"

"No, just some Japanese tricks like the one that put your brother out of business, only different. Your brother could have cleaned up the bunch in a fair fight. It was a trick jab at the base of the neck that downed him."

"Yes, but in a street fight rules don't count. It's an old bone of contention between Buck and Jack, Jack Elwell, the man I am going to marry. Jack will be at the house and he'll be delighted to meet you. He's cracked on ju-jutsu. Did you notice the little Jap that jumped Buck?"

"No—yes, I did. Why?"

Dan was startled at the sudden question.

"Because I think—don't tell Buck or Dan—I think I have seen him on the street before, following me." This in almost a whisper.

"Got any Japs on the place—servants?"

"Yes, Jap butler. I don't like him but he is a wonder if he's let alone."

"Sleep on the place?"

"Yes."

"Out nights?"

The quick dialogue in undertones had to stop here because the carriage rolled noiselessly on to asphalt, so the girl nodded at Dan, then turned to tell her father just what had happened.

"WHERE are my clothes?" demanded a fair, curly-haired and bronzed young man in cowboy raiment.

He stood on the top step of the Brant mansion as the carriage rolled up the drive, feet wide apart and hands on hips, a modern Apollo of the college-ranch school, and demanded as one aggrieved:

"What have you done with my tame rags, me lady? They should have got here yesterday. 'Lo Buck. Howdy, Mr. Brant. Who licked you this time, Buck?"

"Don't try to be a boor, Jack Elwell!" Jammery fired up. "It is quite unnecessary. You never had any manners. Let me introduce you to Dan Wheeler, who has saved Buck's life twice and mine once—and he can do up the whole Harvard team of this

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year or ninety——!" naming the year of the team Elwell had captained.

"Mighty glad to know you, Dan Wheeler."

Elwell gripped hands with Dan and their eyes met in frank and fair challenge a moment, before the blond cowman turned to hand his lady down. As he held out eager hands he turned up a look of hurt appeal, as open as a child's. Miss Jam lifted a round and dimpled chin and took Dan's hand instead, but, as she ran up the steps, she threw over her shoulder a look that was a promise of future forgiveness.

"Where's them pants, I say?" Elwell repeated as the men entered together.

"Ask the marquis."

Buck tilted his head toward the smiling Japanese butler who was superintending the welcome in the hall and directing the maid as to the disposal of wraps.

"I told him, I think, but I am muddled more or less since I got a taste of your darned Jap wrestling and I don't quite remember. But here's a man who can give you points on your own game. Dan's the original ju-jutsuist—and chain-lightning besides."

Somehow the eyes of Elwell and Wheeler had caught again and clung—the blue and the amber-green—and in their look there was the clash and the welcome call of fighting manhood.

"When you two have finished your hypnotizing stunt," spoke up Brant senior's deep voice, "I want to see you in the library. Buck, go fix your head and then come into the library, too."

"Might as well right now, while I am waiting for my trunk to be brought up," said Elwell, following the banker and Dan to the stately room where they sat in a half-circle before the Louis XIV. mantel and grate.

"Because you boys are to be trusted, I want to tell you a thing or two before Buck comes," Brant began simply. "Carhart, Meadows and I have got in bad with the ring that runs politics here, by trying to clean up.

"We had received warnings and threats, but we went on. During the last car strike Carhart was warned to stop or be killed—date and hour specified. At that date and hour he was 'accidentally'shot in the rioting. Munson, his partner, made charges of foul play in the papers and died of 'acute indigestion' the same week, although he had hired detectives to guard him day and night.

"Now Meadows and I are once more warned and threatened. We are held up with a demand of a hundred thousand dollars—the letter came to Meadows today—the penalty is death for one and ruin for the other if the cash were not in a certain place at four o'clock this afternoon. It is now four-thirty."

The two young faces turned toward him were such as any man in danger would be glad to have around him. Both keen, fearless to ruthlessness, and both fired with loyalty. Since he had come to manhood young Wheeler had never been more deeply moved than by this mark of trust on the part of the big banker.

"How long have you had this Jap butler?" he asked evenly.

Brant smiled slightly and shook his head.

"Three months. He's perfect, but I have a Pinkerton man watching him."

"Is Duke Drake one of the leaders in the ring?" asked Dan.

"What do you know about Drake?"

The banker started.

"More than he thinks I know. Have you had dealings with him?"

"Yes, through Lon Cheng, but it was all square and above-board, and I'd take the Chinaman's word for anything. He's the business-head of Drake's interests and I don't——"

"Where's Mr. Meadows?" Dan interrupted, absorbed and frowning.

"In his office on the top floor of his department store—or that's where I left him, with plain-clothes men all over the place."

The banker was interrupted by the buzz of his desk-phone. He sat down at the desk and took off the receiver, unconsciously tapping a pad with his pencil while he waited a few seconds. The pencil suddenly stopped, poised in air, and Brant's strong features hardened.

"Hello! Yes—Brant speaking—Eli Brant. Yes, I remember."

A quick motion of the pencil as he spoke signaled the young men to come nearer.

"Yes—Meadows—what? I didn't get that—noise on the wire—get nearer the phone and speak slowly—yes—I didn't get that last."

While the old war-horse held his voice steady and repeated the words, he had scribbled on the pad and shot it across the desk. Elwell and Wheeler read—

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Munson shot—murderer talking to me—get central on butler's wire—tell them send police.

Before either one could act, however, the banker hung up violently.

"No use. It was a portable wire-tapping outfit, and he got suspicious—made a get-away. He says he shot Munson and that I am to be permitted to live this time but if I don't profit by the warning I shall hear from him again."

The banker was pale but grimly savage.

"What else did he say?" asked Elwell, gray under his tan.

"That I had already lost more than the sum demanded. I don't make any sense of that. I'm in a tight place and such a loss would start a landslide—a run on the Nth National. Let's see if he was lying."

He called up Meadows' store.

"What's this about Mr. Meadows? Yes, I know. What? Well, let's hope he will—let me know—Eli Brant—if there's any change or anything I can do."

As he hung up again, he turned to the anxious faces.

"Not killed, and has a good chance. It might be worse, and I am officially told I am let off this time, so don't say a word to-night—no use scaring Jam and Buck to death."

He tore the written leaf from the pad, as well as the few sheets beneath that showed the depressions of the writing, and threw them into the grate, where they flamed and curled to ashes.

"What troubles you?" Brant asked cheerfully of Dan Wheeler, who was frowning at the fire.

Dan seemed not to hear, but looked up to ask abruptly—

"Is your bank hard to crack?"

"Supposed to be the safest in the country."

"How about an inside job?"

"You mean looting by a bank-employee?"

"Yes."

"I am sure of every one."

"Then that's not it. What have you got here in this house that it would ruin you to lose?"

"N-n-nothing—" the banker hesitated thoughtfully— "except my boy and girl. Their mother has been gone a long time, but they have made it up to me. And if one of them were taken— Some day you boys will know that a man over fifty lives in his children. That would be ruin. That's why, Wheeler—" turning a somber intense gaze on Dan— "I owe you more than I ever owed mortal man before—for what you have done for my two jewels!"

This was said with such intense earnestness, such repression of deep feeling, that it bore no suggestion of stage-effect or overstatement.

Buck's voice followed a sudden scuffling in the entrance-hall.

"Jack! Here's your box! Now you can make yourself pretty. Come and plaster up my head. I can't get at it."

WHEN Dan was alone in the library with Brant, the banker was silent for a few moments before he said:

"There is one thing here of great money-value, unknown to any one but myself. Already I have provided for Buck by putting the Texas ranch in his name. Nothing could touch it if I were to blow up financially. As to the girl, I will show you something that you may never see matched."

From a locked compartment of his desk he took a small steel box, brass-bound and very heavy. A small key opened it, after turning a combination-lock to get at the keyhole, and from it he took a jewel-case. When the cover flew back there blazed and flared an imperial diamond necklace. It was hard to realize that the flaming jewels were motionless, so shifting and vivid were the rays of pure color they shot off.

"I doubt if there's a necklace to match it in America, except the one it was modeled after—that one is in the vaults of my bank. I care nothing for jewels, but the girl does. If I were to go under she could sell the separate stones for two hundred thousand—enough to make her life secure from want." The banker gazed at the diamonds thoughtfully. "I could not replace it. Those are green diamonds and they are priceless. It was a strain to pay for this, but I shall sleep better nights when she has it safely deposited. I shall give it to her on her birthday next week."

"Daddy!" A vision in evening dress peeped in at the door. "There is a gentleman on the front steps who says he wants a word with you right now. He won't come in and he'd like to see you at once—while the hall is empty."

After a quick look to see if she was serious, Brant laid the red case, which he had closed

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before the girl could see it, on the desk before Wheeler.

"Watch that!" he said curtly and went swiftly into the hall.

From there Dan saw him take two steps through the door into the deepening dusk; then the heavy door swung to with a metallic click.

"Oh, Dan Wheeler! Come here!" called a sweet, laughing voice. "The door has caught my skirt, and I can't reach the knob without tearing my new gown. Everybody's up stairs except the cook and you."

Dan, fairly sizzling with blushes, hurried to open the door. The girl was free, even as she ceased her explanation, for the door swung open and Brant stepped in smiling.

"That was Lon Cheng, the Chinaman I told you about, and he came to warn me not to leave any jewels or valuables in the house another minute. He had heard about Meadows and seemed really distressed. Here! What kind of a trick is this?"

Walking to his desk as he talked, he had picked up and opened the jewel-case. It was open—empty!

He held the empty case, looking at Dan with a puzzled frown.

"You didn't hide it for fear she'd come in?"

"No—I didn't touch it—didn't move except to help Ja—Miss Brant get her dress out of the door. Ask her—quick!"

Dan was white to his lips, his mind working in vivid flashes, and one of the lightning pictures he saw was that of prison-bars—more fearful than hell itself to him.

"Call Miss Brant! Quick!" Wheeler repeated and there was a crackle in his tones that aroused the bewildered man.

"Jammery! Here!" he called and the girl entered from the hall.

"What's the—Why, dad!" She ran to her father and looked from him to Dan and then to the empty leather case.

"Your father was showing me a—jewel—when you called him to the door. He put it down on the desk and when he came back it was gone." Dan spoke in a dull monotone, his lips drawn and white. "I was the only man in the room—in sight. You saw me all the time he was gone."

"Of course! How absurd! It must have dropped or rolled somewhere. I can swear you were not near the desk, Dan—" Her tone almost brought tears to that young man's eyes; it did bring a choke to his throat. The girl understood what he was feeling, as only a fine woman can understand.

"I saw you from the time dad put down that red case until he stepped outside the door. Then I—oh, no!" Her hands both flew to her breast in shrinking gesture of pain. "I did turn away to get my lace scarf from a chair. It was then the door closed and caught my dress and I could not turn—this way." She went to Dan with both hands out. "But what's the use of talking? I know, as dad knows, that it's absurd to think you'd do such a stupid, silly thing even if you wanted to."

Brant had thrown his big body into an arm-chair, the red case empty in his big nerveless hand, relaxed, gloomily staring at the floor.

"Dad—daddy!" The girl knelt beside him and stroked his hair. "What's the difference? What do you care for an old jewel more or less?"

"I don't—but who—why——"

He groaned aloud in misery as he turned his great dark eyes on Dan. She followed the glance and at the look in Dan's face covered her own; then she started up.

"But how could he—anybody get away? It must be here somewhere."

"I could have thrown it out of that window to a pal—a confederate," Dan explained wearily, "but, just to go through the motions, I ought to be searched."

"Might as well search me," said Brant without looking up, his chin still resting on his chest.

"Then call an officer," Dan said with a long breath. "Let's cut it short!"

"No—not if I had seen you take it," said the banker. "Not after what you have done for—for us."

"Well I should say not," said the girl. "Dad, can't you see it is impossible? How surely he would be caught?"

"Unless he were very clever—" Brant still spoke with dead weariness— "and planned the whole thing, calculating that our gratitude would be deep enough to make it impossible to arrest him. As it is, Dan Wheeler should go free, even if he had the jewels in his pocket."

"Miss Brant," said Dan, turning a marble face to her, "will you please call Mr. Elwell? It's the last favor I shall ask."

After a look of pity, changing to something like admiration, she went out of the room. There was a silence that neither man

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broke until Elwell came back, looking very grave, his deepset eyes gleaming. Without a word he looked at Brant, then at Dan.

"Will you do me one favor—search me thoroughly?"

After a long look into Dan's impenetrable green eyes, Elwell looked at the girl and she left the room slowly. Then he closed the door and drew the shades. He then turned to Dan.

"Strip!"

When the search was finished, Wheeler asked that his bag be brought and searched as well, also his hat and coat, which last he put on. Then, hat and bag in hand, he turned to the banker.

"Mr. Brant, I want to thank you for several things that would sound foolish just now. If you change your mind within five days and want to have me arrested, I shall be at Drake's. Ask Lon Cheng."

"Dan Wheeler—" Elwell placed himself before Dan as he turned to the door—"shake once more." As their hands met Elwell said: "I've known you about half an hour and I don't give a —— what you have done. Whatever it was, you didn't do it—and you're a he-man!"

Dan bowed very slightly as he left the room, and the front door stood ajar as he went out. It might have been a deserted house as he went down the granite steps and around the gravel drive to the street now twinkling with lamps.

VI

WHAT young Wheeler was thinking and feeling as he walked down the broad avenue alone that night, nobody will ever know. He thought little about his own sensations and talked of them still less. But he was enough absorbed not to notice the man he overhauled until roused by the quiet words—

"Then the necklace was gone."

It was the Chinaman, Lon Cheng, walking slowly and serenely down the avenue on his way home. His hands were in his silken sleeves and he was as calmly bland as if he looked at the world and all therein from another planet. After a quick look at Dan and away again, the Oriental gentleman walked at his side for some time before again speaking.

"You will come home with me."

"Yes, I was going to Drake's."

"You will be contented there for a week. There is a better room near mine and a gymnasium—a small one—near by. I shall teach you a little more how to conquer by yielding."

"Ju-jutsu?" asked Dan. "Japanese wrestling?"

"Ju-jutsu is one name for a part of the art," said Lon Cheng, "but it did not originate in Japan. Neither do the Japanese know its greatest secrets."

"How about Drake—or Snead—does he know the best?" Dan asked.

"No. He has in some way got a few very dangerous holds and strokes, but the best can never be learned by a man like Snead." A pause followed. "They are only entrusted to the worthy. For centuries they belonged to the nobility alone."

Dan looked at the placid face at his side. Through how many centuries before the white man lived in houses had this face—the same in features and in its calm dignity, masking the same deep secrets—been handed down unchanged from father to son? Already this magician had made him forget his troubles—had wiped them from his mind as a sponge wipes a slate. Could it be that such a man had human feelings?

"It must take years, then, to get the best tricks of the game?" he asked.

"Yes. Years of practise and self-restraint before you are fit to know the most deadly. But a few days under a master may be enough to learn how to foil the most deadly attacks. A past-master of the arts of ju-jutsu and yawara, even though unarmed himself, could defeat the best swordsman, hatchet-man or strangler. With a closed fan, a kitchen utensil, or his hands alone, he could safely meet an armed antagonist and disable, disarm and even kill him."

Dan had heard some of this before, but now, for the first time, he knew he was listening to one who spoke with truth and authority.

"What do you get out of this?" he asked abruptly. "I can't pay you in any way."

"That you do not know," said the Chinaman, "but, even if it were true, it remains my duty to pass on the knowledge to youth, wherever I find one fit, willing and worthy, else the art would die. Be patient and you will learn many things."

The oddly matched pair walked far and long without speaking. They were nearing their destination before Lon Cheng said:

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"While we are not overheard I must tell you some things you need to know. Strange as they will seem now, you will understand them before you leave us. First, this double-man Drake-Snead. From noon till midnight you will deal with Snead, with a mania for jewels, cruelty and games of chance, especially poker, which he plays like a demon. From midnight to noon you will find Drake, a man of honor and kindly impulses, rather lacking in energy, but of great mental capacity. The man Snead cannot be tolerated much longer. We must put an end to this double personality or the result will be fatal. You may be—and I think you are—the man to help us. Do not irritate Snead. Avoid him when you can, but treat Drake as if Snead did not exist. You feel no fear of either."

It was not a question, so Dan did not answer. Instead he asked—

"About the poker game tonight?"

"Snead will have to be humored. I shall furnish you with money and sit in the game myself. The fourth man will be a wealthy cattleman, 'Uncle U,' originally a Vermont Yankee, since then a manager and then partner of Eli Brant in his ranching ventures. His name is Uriah Greylock, and at sixty he is the most expert gunman in the West. You are to meet him in a few minutes. Be sure to call him Uncle U. He is peculiar and very lovable."

Lon Cheng had spoken rapidly and concisely in order to finish before they reached the door of his spicy-smelling curio store. Here he preceded Dan and led him into the cosey rear room, beyond which they found a man who might have been any age from thirty to seventy. His face was of the Joe Jefferson type, with large humorous nose and jutting, round chin, both of which moved when he chewed, and he was always chewing something. He was reading and chewing gum when the two entered, and rose quickly to his slender six feet.

"Lo Cheng! How are ye?" he asked as they shook hands. "Who's this?"

His keen gray eyes under their heavy brows shot straight into Dan's.

"Dan Wheeler, who is going back with you next week—" Lon Cheng smiled with unusual warmth—"and who will be the fourth man in a game of draw with Snead, you and myself this evening."

"Devil he is!" said Uncle U, his eyes snapping as he gave Dan a quick grip. "S'pose that settles it! Looks 's if he might handle a Colt. Ever ride, herd or brand calves?" he asked Wheeler and went on without an answer. "Not apt to stay long in one place, anyhow, with them eyes. No safe piece o' mechanism to monkey with right now. How old be ye?"

"Twenty-two," said Dan, smiling slightly for the first time since he had left the Brants.

"Don't look it. When d'we eat?" he asked Lon Cheng.

"Just as soon as I show Dan his room opposite yours."

"All right. Don't get to gassin' and forget I ain't et since breakfast."

They left him before the fire, reading and chewing rapidly.

"THIS is your suite." Lon Cheng showed Dan into a large sitting-room furnished with heavy old-fashioned mahogany. "And it has two bedrooms, entered at this corner," he went on, throwing open the door in a recess at the far corner of the room, "and by swinging this mirror you close the entrance to one and uncover the door to the other—thus."

A large mirror or pier-glass swung from one angle of the recess to the other, revealing and concealing in turn the two doors, but always resting at the angle that reflected the door that was free, so that, from a few feet distant in the sitting-room, one always saw one bedroom door apparently in the same place. After looking into each in turn, Lon Cheng said in a low voice:

"Nobody, not even Snead, knows of another way out from the left-hand room. It leads by a narrow staircase to the basement; it was put in by the former owner and kept secret by him. He had that last resort in case of police-raids."

"Something like the one outside the roulette-room," said Dan.

"And on each floor." The Chinaman showed no surprize. "But now is no time to follow it up. We have much to do before we play poker at eleven o'clock."

"The main thing is to eat," said Dan.

His appetite was not even dulled by his prospects or by his late disaster. He was incapable of worry, and the coming game of poker with Snead with its possibilities for manslaughter or mutilation did not

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cause him any uneasiness. He dined with Uncle U and Lon Cheng in the expensive dining-room of the Orange Club, in the same building, and heard the rumors of the game for blood and big money scheduled for that night.

He even had to hear the jocose warnings given to Uncle U not to have his beauty spoiled for life by the man-eating gambler. It was humor of a decidedly Homeric flavor, for Snead had actually maimed at least three men, while the number he had harried into a quarrel in order to have an excuse for shooting them was variously estimated from four to a dozen. Uncle U watched Dan closely all through this badgering and made no attempt to stop it, but when the three had finished and adjourned to Lon Cheng's little rooms back of his shop, it was Uncle U who seemed to take command.

"Well, Cheng," he said, chewing a toothpick busily, "the boy's all right—nerve all through—and he's just the lad to turn the trick. The trouble is, he's a natural born killer, and if he gets riled 'bout so much there's goin' t'be the old scratch t'pay. He'd sooner rip Snead open than eat, and 's I understand it, ye don't want 'im bumped off—not till ye've found out where he's got all that loot hid, anyway."

"That is correct," said Lon Cheng. "We have to take that chance, with the balancing possibility that Snead may get him. Either outcome would be fatal to the success of our experiment, but it is a necessary drawback, for a young man of more docile nature would be useless—would be hypnotized, terrorized by Snead's horrible smile."

The Chinaman turned to Dan with a face blank of all expression, to explain:

"The object of this poker game is not to win Snead's money, but to humiliate him—to balk him and check him up in his insane self-conceit as well as in his lust for torture and for gain. If he could be so bruised about the face that he would be ashamed to show himself for a few days, or temporarily lamed so as to make him slow on his feet, it would be the best possible result. To do these things it is necessary that you should be entirely free from fear, both conscious and subconscious."

"If I'm scared I don't know it—not now," said Dan. "About the rest of it, I can't say I quite understand, but I certainly don't like that smile of his and I'd enjoy putting a crimp in it."

"I don't need to tell you not to let him get a hold—especially of wrist, ankle or collar."

Dan's thin lips quirked as he made his sole comment—

"Darned queer poker rules."

"Poker's only an excuse," was Uncle U's curt comment. "Just swing on to one thing: Don't kill the cuss and don't let him kill you. Don't give him an excuse to shoot and don't give him a chance to use the 'road-agent's spin' on you."

"Show me," Dan eagerly asked.

Uncle U produced from somewhere about his person a full-grown Colt.

"Suppose you got the drop on me and make me hand over my gun. I pass it to you like this. Notice the curl of my trigger-finger around the trigger-guard—with the handle down. Just as you reach for it——"

There was a blurred blue whirr where the gun was and the handle slapped to rest in his palm at the same instant that the hammer clicked.

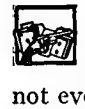
"That one would just about o' plugged your third vest-button," said Uncle U.

"Don't let him pull that old one on you. 'Nother thing, if you ketch him palmin' a card or slippin' a few aces up his sleeve, get the drop before you call attention to it, or it won't do a mite o' good. That's why he wants to play that kind of game."

"I think that's enough," said Lon Cheng. "To tell him more will only confuse him and make him slow to act."

"No, sir," said Dan with cheerful emphasis. "I'll just forget it."

"He's all right," said Uncle U. "What're we waitin' for?"



THE room up-stairs was a small bare box without ornament, containing a table and four chairs, with not even a picture on the walls. Also Dan noted that it opened only on the hallway near the head of the stairs, and opposite one of the long door-mirrors whose use he already knew. Nobody was allowed to witness the game and only one servant—Snead's inseparable dumb Jap—was in attendance.

Lon Cheng, Uncle U and Dan reached the top of the stairs close together. They looked into the empty room and Lon Cheng

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turned to speak to the Jap, who stood in the hall in front of the mirror.

"Tell Mr. Snead we are waiting."

At the same instant he stepped into the little room, the other two following. They had not quite crossed the threshold when a nasal voice behind them twanged—

"Mr. Snead is never late!"

And where the Jap had stood two seconds ago, stood Snead, evil head lowered and pale eyes blinking at them. In spite of the fact that he knew how this trick was done, Wheeler found the effect startling. It would have gone far to unnerve a novice and a stranger to the mechanical devices built into the house for that purpose. As he stood leering at them, Snead looked a very devil.

Stepping past them swiftly, he put a gun and a pile of gold pieces on the table, sitting down at the same moment. All his motions were made with the cat-like quickness seen only in certain men who have the hunting instincts highly developed. Young Wheeler's movements had the same quality in even higher degree. He followed suit instantly, sitting opposite Snead. Lon Cheng, perhaps with intent to annoy, put down his own pile of money but not a gun.

"Where's your Colt?" Snead asked offensively. "You knew that was agreed on. To go unarmed is an old coward's trick."

"I never fired one," said the Chinaman as he sat down, however, he put on the table a revolver like the other three.

"You're a liar!" snarled Snead.

Lon Cheng replied mildly.

"Thank you," he replied, picking up a pack of cards and breaking the seal.

It was then that young Dan, his green eyes never leaving Snead's face, surprized them all by remarking—

"What a nasty cur you are, aren't you?"

Snead's lips whitened, but he forced a grin.

"No harm to try, kid, but it can't be did."

Uncle U smiled.

"Come, cut for deal. I can't give more than half an hour to clean up this little mess," said Snead eagerly, referring to the table-stakes of fifteen hundred each, already agreed on. As they cut he went on—"It's understood that anything goes that you can get away with, but the man caught cheating loses his pile, unless he's quicker with his gun and beats the other fellow to it."

Silence gave consent and Snead cut an ace.

"I'll deal—your ante," he called to Cheng. "Get some action!"

The Chinaman put a five-dollar gold piece in the center of the table and the game was on. When they had played their first hand Snead raised the ante.

"Fifty to draw cards. Who plays?"

Wheeler alone forfeited his ante and stayed out. Snead stood pat. Cheng and Uncle U took three cards each, and the latter bet another fifty.

"Raise you five hundred," said Snead and both the others dropped their cards.

Snead, as he raked the stakes toward his pile, threw his hand down in the center, face up. He had a pair of fours.

"That, my little children, is what is termed bluffing. A coward is a poor bluffer."

On the next hand Dan held a pair of aces and drew a third with a pair of kings. Snead happened to get three queens, but by some uncanny instinct he dropped out at the first bet. On the third hand Snead drew three cards and bet wild. Uncle U and Cheng stayed with him up to half their pile, only to see him throw down four queens and rake in the biggest pot to date.

All this time Snead was fretting that the game was slow and piking.

"You two have about six hundred apiece left. Make this a frozen jack for six hundred all round."

It was even so, and Snead opened and won on a show-down. That left Cheng and Uncle U clean and Dan with about four hundred.

"Match you or cut the pack for the size of your pile," said Snead briskly. "Can't waste time on small change."

"No—make it another jack-pot for four hundred," said Dan. "And if I get something perhaps I'll borrow."

Snead nodded and Dan put all his remainder in the pot against an equal amount. On the third hand Snead called for a fresh pack and the Jap brought it. It was Snead's deal and he passed the opened pack to Dan for inspection. Dan looked at the back of the cards and waved them away. Snead dealt and Dan opened, calling for three cards. To his pair of kings he drew the other two, and Snead stood pat.

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"I want to bet this hand," Dan announced and showed his hand to Uncle U, asking— "Have you got anything valuable to lend me?"

"Um-hum," Uncle U assented carelessly after a glance at the four kings. "Here's this."

He pulled out a big gold watch absurdly set with diamonds. Snead's eyes glittered as he leaned across the table to look at the brilliants, one hand hidden by his body and the table-top.

"Hands aboveboard!" called Uncle U, detaching the watch from its chain.

"Sure," replied Snead, his hand appearing again on the table. He added— "Go you a thousand—credit—on the side I've got him beaten."

"You've made a bet."

Snead pushed his pile in with the watch, threw his hand face-up and reached for the pot. He had a spade straight flush—nine to king.

"WAIT!"

Dan's voice cracked like a whip-lash. He threw his king of spades beside the one in Snead's straight.

"Is this a pinocle pack?" he asked crisply.

At the same moment his right hand, flat on the table, showed first and middle fingers spread wide.

"You salted those kings!" yapped Snead, white about the mouth, as he darted a hand to his gun on the table. It never reached the weapon.

Instead of reaching for his own new Colt, Dan made a lightning two-handed move. His right darted his two spread fingers to Snead's eyes, while with his left he cuffed Snead's gun off the table to the floor—all before Snead's words had left his lips.

With a howl of pain Snead staggered to his feet, his hands covering his streaming eyes. For a moment nobody moved. Dan, on his feet with hands on the table, waited Snead's next move. The two elder men shoved back a bit and looked on with relish.

The moment he could see, Snead, noting that Dan had not taken up his gun, dived straight for him across the table, as silent as a bulldog, his lean, powerful hands outstretched and clawing.

"Duck!" shouted Uncle U, knowing the deadly strength and skill of those hands. Dan already had ducked, had slipped under the table feet first, kicking both viciously at Snead's ankles.

The result was a slap-stick farce change of positions, Snead plunging over with the upset table to a somersault on the floor among the rolling gold pieces, while Wheeler sprang to his feet on the side opposite his own. His taunting grin so enraged the bad man that he charged again blindly—so blindly as to get a straight left square in his wolfish, snarling mouth.

As he landed the driving blow, Dan said with emphasis—

"Never liked that smile, anyway!"

A second time Snead got up from the floor to charge, with the same result, but the third time he seemed to lose all control of himself. He drew a thin, bright blade from his neck-band and again bodily launched himself at Wheeler.

This time Dan swung up the heavy chair Snead had sat in and crashed it into the grinning, murderous mask as it came on, speaking at the same time the clear-cut words—

"I'll spoil that —— smile!" This time Snead stayed down, bleeding from the mouth.

"Best I could do," Wheeler apologized to Lon Cheng. "There's the rest of that cold deck the Jap slipped to him," he said, indicating the cards spilling from the vest of the unconscious man. "Does he need any more?"

"It is enough, and well done," said Lon Cheng, motioning to the silent Jap, who had appeared in the hall.

The little man trotted in, bent over the unconscious form and raised the shoulders. At the same moment Snead opened his eyes and made a feeble motion of his legs. In the dead silence there came, faint and muffled from a clock somewhere in the building, twelve slow strokes. The Jap seemed startled to sudden haste, dragged the reviving body rapidly to the door, but not so rapidly that Snead could not seize something from the floor close by and stuff it hurriedly into his vest. At the same time his pale, vicious eyes glared up at Dan as he rasped through his cut lips:

"I'll get you, Wheeler! You'd better be dead! Hear? Better be dead!"

The three men saw the small Jap let go his charge, press the frame of the mirror and swing it on its pivot without even attempting concealment by closing the door behind him. From the opening stepped his twin brother, and the two picked Snead

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up to bear him out of sight, while the mirror swung into place behind them.

It seemed as if the air were purer on the instant. Dan, still breathing rather quickly, went into the hall and tried to swing the mirror-door. It would not stir, however hard he pressed the frame.

"It will not work without another man on the other side."

Dan started to find Lon Cheng at his shoulder.

"There is a spring-bolt on each side, and both must be released at once to let it swing free. However, it is about time——"

"The son-of-a-gun took it sure as shootin'," came the voice of Uncle U from the room, where he had righted the table and was searching the floor among the gold pieces. "It was worth more than all the rest of that jack-pot. If I'd 'a' had any notion what he was grabbin', I'd 'a' took a hand, twelve o'clock or not twelve. Besides, it was a present from Jem Slater—time we cleaned up them rustlers down on the border."

"Never mind, Uncle," said the Chinaman. "I am more sure than ever that we shall get it back for you, as well as some other jewels for their owners. Did you notice that Snead has no power over young Wheeler? In fact he seems to lose his head under Wheeler's eyes. We shall win, if Wheeler stays with us."

"Mebbe so—if he does. He's the most unexpected young tike I ever set eyes on."

Though the keen gray eyes were piercing in their steady keenness, they had a warm tribute as they met young Dan's, and the tone used was one of rare attraction.

"'Bout time he knew what he's up to, hunh?" he asked the grave Oriental.

"I was just about to tell him when you interrupted, that it is about time to tell Duke how well the experiment worked. He will be impatient to know details."

TURNING as he spoke, Cheng again crossed the hall, knocked once, then three times on the frame of the mirror. He pressed the frame, shoulder-high, and it swung open noiselessly. Through it, into the hall and the full light, stepped Snead, well-groomed and unmarked. Not even a hair of his sleek head was out of place and his face was smooth, even pleasant to look at, for all the mark on the temple and the triangular jutting jaw.

In fact, it was Duke Drake, and his first words were:

"Lon Cheng, I give in. You were right. It is the only way, and this proves it. How are you, Uncle U?"

As he shook hands with the tall cowman he was looking over his shoulder at Dan, with unmistakable warmth and welcome in his eyes. He now turned to young Wheeler:

"We are going to do things—make history this week, Dan. Mighty glad to see you back, though it's a shame about that necklace. We'll try to change all that and, judging from the last half-hour's work, we shall strike thirteen. But—" he was holding Dan's hand in a firm grip now—"it's going to be fast work, and you have got to train to the minute." He turned to the other two men. "That right?"

The Chinaman bowed gravely, and Uncle U shifted his quid of gum to remark:

"Trainin' 's all right, but I'd back the kid to do the cuss right this minute—lock the two of 'em in a room. Jes' same, p'raps it's well enough not to take any chances we don't haf to. Y' ought to been here, Duke, it was worth a farm to see the boy slam him in the mouth. 'Don't like that smile,' sezee, and stuck his fist right in the middle of it." Uncle U showed his teeth in a boyish grin. "One o' the slickest pieces o' work y'ever see. But they messed up things consid'able between 'em," he remarked, chewing and looking about him at the scattered money and broken chair.

"I saw his face," said Drake. "I could imagine the rest. He will keep out of sight for several days. And now, Lon Cheng, if you are going to train our champion, it's about time you tucked him in bed."

"That I will do," said Cheng. "Meanwhile it would be well if you would watch Jerry while he picks up and counts this money. It belongs in equal parts to Uncle U, Dan Wheeler and the house."

"Boy can have mine!" snapped Uncle U rapidly. "Jus' so he helps get me my turnip back." He chewed several rapid strokes before adding—"And if he don't git it, he c'n have it anyway."

Seated in one of the three sound chairs with feet on the table, the cattleman was as sharply observant and quizzically contented as ever. He now cocked an eye

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at the company and, to forestall any protest or thanks, he talked on.

"I feel 'bout it as the feller did 'bout the butter. Powerful fond o' butter he was, but the old woman didn't let him git a fair hack at it only on Sundays when they had the minister to dinner. He was everlastingly tuckin' it into him one Sunday, an' she couldn't hold in any longer. 'John,' sez she, 'buttah sells fer thutty-five cents a paound,' sez she, an' she gives him a freezin' stare. 'Un-hunh,' sez John, 'so I hear, an', gol-dum it,' sezee, gougin' off 'nother hunk with his knife, 'gol-dum it, it's wuth it,' sezee."

With a look, Lon Cheng called Dan and led him through the wide-open mirror-door. As they passed along a narrow hallway to another stair-landing where there was an exactly similar mirror, Lon Cheng said:

"Through that door is Snead's quarters. He may be there now, but it is more probable that he is in his underground passage—on his way to add those diamonds to his secret hoard. You shall know more about that later. As I told you, one of your bedrooms has a passage that leads to the same dangerous catacombs, and that one is known only to you and me. It may prove the key to the situation, if the worst happens, but it is not a danger to you in the meantime. You can sleep well and forget it. Had you suspected that Snead and Drake were two different—very different men?"

"Yes, but it seemed too simple and improbable."

"That is why it was unsuspected. People like to be fooled—to believe the strange and wonderful—and the resemblance is unusual, even without the mark, which is artificial on Drake's face. Until Snead became uncontrollable, the scheme worked wonders." At the door of his room Cheng said: "Tomorrow we begin work in the gymnasium. Sleep well and fear nothing. Good night."

VII

ONE week to the minute after the disappearance of the Brant necklace, Buck and his father met by appointment at the Orange Club, in the same block with Drake's but on the opposite corner. Buck had been waiting for some minutes when his father entered. The banker looked years older than on the evening, seven days back, when he had taken Dan Wheeler to his home, but as his worried glance fell on his son, fresh and glowing from his gymnasium work and shower, the lines of worry vanished for the moment.

"Well, son, I'm glad this week is done," said the father. "It has taken it out of me; I must be getting old."

"Doesn't follow at all," protested Buck. "You have had enough to break down a bronze image." He looked about to see if they were alone. "Are you going to get rid of that darned necklace tonight?"

The necklace Buck meant was the famous necklace of green diamonds held as security for an immense loan to the jewelers Griffin & Co. It was kept in the vaults of Brant's bank and was the model for the one stolen from his house. It was worth many times the amount of the loan and, in this time of mysterious thefts and threats, it had disturbed the banker's sleep for a week. To make good its actual value, in case of its loss, would almost, if not quite, carry out the anonymous threat of ruin.

"Yes," Brant rumbled moodily. "Thank the Lord! Stan Griffin is staying at the Blackstone on his way to New York. He goes tonight and I am to turn the thing over to him in a few minutes—on the way home. He will sign a receipt and take a load off my mind. I'll be glad to get you safely off on the way to the Lazy X with Uncle U in the morning. Jam is safe with her aunt, and tomorrow night I shall sleep. Got your outfit and everything ready?"

"Yes—and Dad"—Buck leaned over, flushing—"Uncle U is taking Dan Wheeler along."

"No!"

Stopping in his tracks as they were walking toward the door, the banker turned on his son, frowning.

"He said nothing to me about it."

"What objection have you, dad?" Buck asked quietly. "You know you said you did not think he had anything to do with the robbery when you found that Kotura had disappeared at the same instant. I wish you could say just a word to him before we go. He admires you very much. I wish you could see him stripped—at the gym."

"Of course that proves his character is perfect, if he has a good biceps," Brant said with a curl of his firm lips, "but I told

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you you might bring him around again. What do you want? Want me to go to him on my knees? How many men would have let him go without putting him in jail if they had caught him in the same fix as I did in my library that night?"

"He feels all that, dad, though he doesn't say much, but he is as proud as you are. I am mighty glad he is going to the ranch with me. I shall enjoy the Summer twice as much."

"No doubt. Naturally you'd prefer the society of a gambler and a jailbird to that of your father, and of course I shall feel safer."

"Don't, dad. I'll dare you to take a vacation in the North Woods instead."

"Forget it, son! I am worse than a wounded grizzly. My nerves are worn to a frazzle. Come on! Let's get the air."

Buck's eyes were moist at the humility of the confession. Father and son were lifelong comrades and theirs was a companionship that was rare and rarely beautiful. Buck knew that his father would suffer and reproach himself for a harsh word long after he himself had forgot it. As they turned to descend the broad stairs to the street, he began to tell the doings of the afternoon in the gymnasium. At the same time he avoided looking in his father's face, but in the tall mirror opposite the head of the stairs he could not help seeing that the banker was harassed and depressed.

"Mr. Brant." A noiseless attendant spoke from the room they had left. "A man would like to speak to you one moment on the phone—in the writing-room."

"Wait here. I'll cut it short," Brant said as he turned quickly.

"Certainly I'll wait. You can't shake me until we have been to the Blackstone," Buck called after him cheerily. Then, half to himself, he muttered: "I wish he wouldn't worry so much about us kids. That's all he wants to make money for, but all the wealth there is wouldn't count if anything should happen to that dad of mine. One thing is sure: I shall not let him out of sight until he has got rid of that miserable necklace. Wish diamonds had never been invented."

IN THE small room behind Lon Cheng's curio shop, smelling of spices and joss sticks, Drake and Uncle U sat waiting for the Chinaman. Cheng was giving young Wheeler one last lesson in ju-jutsu before he should leave for the Texas ranch with Uncle U and his outfit.

"So you're all ready to leave? I rather wish I were going with you," said Drake, who smoked contentedly in a large wicker chair. "And I hate to lose young Wheeler. I have become rather attached to the boy, and on the whole I am glad it has not been possible to send him down into Snead's underground death-trap.

"We are well rid of the maniac, even if he has got away with all those diamonds, but I rather expected he would try to make one more haul before clearing out and try to get his revenge on young Dan at the same time. He has suspected our scheme, with a maniac's cunning, or else Dan did his last job too well and Snead is afraid of him. Anyhow, he seems to have got out by some hidden passage, taking the jewels and the Jap with him."

"Don't crow till you're out o' the woods," said Uncle U, chewing his spruce deliberately. "It's a couple of hours before train-time, and I been loafin' around here just to keep an eye on young Dan. I don't give a hoot fer all them diamonds, but I'd hate like tophet to see Snead get his devil's claws on a handsome youngster like Dan or Buck Brant. 'Fraid? Hunh! Snead ain't afraid of the old Nick himself and he can crunch every joint in their bodies. I feel it in my bones he's somewhere 'round here yet. What say, Lon? Think the cuss has cleared out sure?"

He looked up to ask the question of the silent Oriental, who had entered as he was speaking.

"It is impossible to be sure," said Lon Cheng gravely, "unless we find his outlet from the old vaults, and he could easily obliterate all traces of that, as well as the vaults themselves, by a small charge of dynamite. We know he had several such charges in place. That is one reason why we have not succeeded in finding his hoard, but there has been no sound of an explosion, not even a rumble. I quite agree that there is no certainty of his having gone, but we can do no more at present."

It was plain that both Drake and Uncle U felt the mental superiority of the cultured Chinaman and left the direction of affairs to him. Lon Cheng took his place cross-legged on a low couch and sat motionless as if listening to his own thoughts.

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"Wa-all," sighed Uncle U resignedly, "'f he's holed-up down there, I bet ye it means trouble fer somebody."

He was interrupted by sounds of a sudden entrance to the store in front, which was tended by a Celestial subordinate.

"I know the way. I can't wait. Let me pass!"

It was the voice of Eli Brant, crackling with tense excitement. Dashing aside the curtains, the banker appeared, wild-eyed, disheveled and bareheaded. He carried a revolver, held at the level of his hip, and he turned it on Drake as he gritted between set teeth.

"Give me my boy, Drake! Quick! Where is my boy?"

"I don't know where your boy is, Eli Brant. Where was he when——"

"No words! My boy—give him to me or die here and now!"

The banker seemed to be beyond control, his lip and the gun were unsteady.

"Careful there, Eli!"

Uncle U got up deliberately and took the gun from his old friend as from a child.

"Might go off any minute. Now set down and talk sense. We'll get the boy." He put his hand on Brant's shoulder. "We are your friends, Eli; tell us about it."

The big man seemed about to break down but opened a clenched left hand that held a crumpled envelope. Uncle U took it and handed it to Lon Cheng.

"Can't read 'thout specs," said Uncle U. "Read it out."

Dad! Snead has got me. If you want to see me again give that necklace to the Jap within an hour. If you delay or try to follow I shall be buried alive. Hurry! BUCK.

"What's this mean, Lon Cheng?" The banker shook as with an ague. "You don't lie. Am I insane—crazy?"

"You are not, my friend, for I am your friend, but you suffer. You must make an effort to be calm if you want to save your boy. Listen carefully."

"Thank God! Then there's a chance? But go on—an hour? Then it's true?"

Starting to his feet with a shout, Brant got himself in hand with a violent effort that was pitiful. Then he sat down again.

"Go on. I listen. I'm in hell," he muttered in an undertone.

"It is true," said Lon Cheng, speaking with simple directness, as if to a child. "Snead has your son in a place underground. Yes, that is Duke Drake you see here, but there have been two men all the time—two men who look much alike. Simon Snead is the one who has seized your son and holds him for ransom in an old subcellar vault near by. Duke Drake is the man you see before you, who had nothing to do with this or with the other crimes of the last few weeks.

"At first these two men made use of their similarity in various ways. Drake was in evidence from midnight to noon, Snead from noon to midnight—one was on duty all the time; hence Sleepless Snead and other mysteries that were turned to their profit."

"Yes, yes!" Brant was on his feet again. "Time is passing. Cut it short! Where is this underground vault?"

"Take my word—" Lon Cheng raised a hand in warning—"all this is necessary and there is time enough if it is not wasted in interruptions. We have thirty minutes more."

As Brant subsided, gripping his chair-arms, he went on:

"When Snead became unmanageable—developed a mania for theft, torture and homicide—it became necessary to break up this partnership, but it was difficult. Snead is dangerous in many ways and very wily. He had agreed to leave this city and the country. He was to have left the city today, but it is now evident that he waited to make one more haul. He has no scruples, no mercy; in fact he delights in torture. He holds your son for ransom and will not hesitate to carry out his threat if he does not get it, or think he is getting it."

"But why not surround the block—dig him out—send a dozen men down——"

"Time wasted," Cheng warned with hand upraised again. "Time is lacking, and at the first sign of the approach of an overpowering force, even of two men or one whom he believed dangerous, he is prepared to bury them alive in the passages they must go through, or obliterate the vault itself, while he escapes by his own outlet, which we have not yet discovered. He knows that, by his strength and skill in ju-jutsu, he is a match for almost any two men. Moreover, you must remember that any attempt at excavation would destroy the whole underground structure by the inrush of water and made-earth. The vault

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must have been dug with a caisson, for it is several feet below the lake-level. No, there is but once chance."

"And that?" Brant strained forward.

"To send Dan Wheeler with the necklace."

"But is he a match for Snead? Suppose Snead——"

"Yes—a chance that is unavoidable." Lon Cheng was very grave. "Snead thinks he is more than a match for Wheeler, and that makes it possible for Dan to get to him. It is a desperate chance, but I see no other."

"Then we must take it. Where is he—young Wheeler?"

There was a moment of strained silence before Lon Cheng answered.

"Remember there is nothing to offer him—no price that can be compared to the value of the service asked of him. And I can not use any pressure—can not even advise him to do it, because the chances against him are so desperate and the issue so horrible."

"But I will pay! I will—oh-h!" With a groan he dropped in a chair and buried his face in his hands. "I forget that this may finish me. It's the last straw." He started up once more. "But I can get more. I'll do something—anything. Get him here! Quick! Where is he? How much time left? Have you men no bowels? Will nobody move? Where is he? Where?"

"He has been sent for," said Drake kindly, "with orders to bring him instantly. He was in the gymnasium—and here he is!"

IT WOULD have seemed a dramatic tableau, if there had been any man present sufficiently detached to appreciate it.

The three elderly men—the impenetrable Oriental, the lean, hard-bitten gambler and the big masterly banker accustomed to wielding great power and to seeing men beg and plead before him—and, in the doorway, the bright figure of the almost-naked youth to whom they all looked in an appeal so strained as to be an agony. In a light clout and rubber shoes, just as he had been hurried from the gymnasium, he was a model for a Greek Mercury. On a body of perfect grace and swift power, he bore his fair head like a young emperor.

Under oddly dark brows the long green eyes gleamed. In their steady rays one could fancy little devils danced, and now the parted lips, curled faintly in the suggestion of a smile, showed an even white line of teeth. He appeared disdainful—slightly cruel.

The banker's back was to the door and as he turned and got a fair look at the youth he gasped and caught his breath. Before he had got his tongue, the Chinaman had spoken.

"Dan, at the last minute the chance for which you trained has come. Buck Brant is held for ransom. Snead has him in the lowest vault and demands another necklace of diamonds like the first one stolen from Mr. Brant. For Buck's father it means ruin to make good the loss, but it is the price for his son's life and he has—" looking at a clock on the mantel—"sixteen minutes. You are the only man besides myself who knows the way to where Snead has his prisoner and his treasure—even you do not know the way out! We know that. But, unless you make the desperate attempt, Buck will be buried alive in fifteen minutes."

In the silence the clock on the mantel ticked another fifteen seconds. Brant panted audibly like a spent sprinter. Lon Cheng spoke once more.

"I can not urge you to make the attempt, for we hoped to find Snead's own way out and we have not found it. Your only chance would be to withold the diamonds until safely outside, trusting that his greed prove stronger than his passion for man-slaughter and revenge, or else to win a man-to-man battle with him—you naked and he armed. Absolutely nothing binds you to make the desperate attempt. You are free to make your own decision. You have fourteen minutes."

All this time Dan had looked calmly at Lon Cheng; now he turned the long, greenish eyes slowly toward Eli Brant.

He saw a man to whom he was an utter stranger, a man humbled, tortured, helpless, unable to utter one word. What had the banker to offer to the man he had let leave his house in disgrace—under tacit suspicion. Even the love of a father for his son is a sealed book to youth.

"Dan Wheeler——"

Brant choked and tears ran down his cheeks.

"What money and property I have left is yours, if you can save my boy. You

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can go to the Texas ranch as its half-owner."

He could go no further at the moment.

"Money!" Dan spoke hardly above a whisper. "I can get money, spend it and get more. How much good does it do you? A week ago you were——"

A wave of his graceful hand finished the sentence.

Slowly Brant's head dropped into his hands and from behind those powerful hands came a hoarse murmur.

"My boy! My great fine lad! And I can't even pray—can't——"

"I won't go for money, Mr. Brant." With a lithe step Dan approached the banker and laid one light hand on his heavy shoulder. "I don't want your ranch, but, because you trusted me, I'll go get Buck or—" a greenish glint flashed toward Lon Cheng and Uncle U as his queer little half-smile appeared—"Sim Snead will know he has been in one —— of a fight!"

"But you can't go the way you are—unarmed," said Brant, suddenly raising his head.

"This is the way I must go. If Snead should see me coming and even suspect that I had a gun, he would destroy me before I could reach him. The passage to the cellar is mined. No, Snead is crazy and he possesses a crazy man's craftiness. He never uses a gun himself. He prefers slow torture.

As Dan spoke the banker's head again dropped into his hands and when, finally, he looked up, he saw only Uncle U blowing his nose violently while Lon Cheng was lighting a bubble-pipe with a smooth, steady hand.

Dan had gone as silently and as quickly as a shaft of light.

Suddenly the banker thrust a hand into his overcoat pocket.

"But the necklace? It's gone!"

He frantically went through his other pockets until Cheng interposed wearily:

"Of course it's gone. Dan has it. He took it from your pocket because he dislikes any show of feeling—and time is short."

VIII

IN THE old vault, Buck sat upon a heavy box, his hands and feet tied with a strong cord drawn painfully tight. A heavy cable passed round and round his body and the pillar of masonry against his back. The hour since his message to his father had gone in the hands of the Jap, Kotura, had seemed ages long. His writhing against his bonds had only sapped his strength and pleased Snead, who had come twice to gloat over his sufferings.

Twice Snead had come to do this and to make sure his captive's bonds were tight. Each time he had drawn them tighter, blackening his hands with dead blood; he had smiled at Buck with his brutal, filthy smile; then he had gone, taking his lantern with him. So horrible had been the dank darkness, the rats that had gradually grown bolder and more fierce at each return and the slow, echoing drip of water into a cistern somewhere beyond, that he almost longed for the return of the maniac, preferring any torture to the lonely dark and the rats.

At last he came for the third time, appearing in one of three vaulted archways that seemed to lead to three diverging passages. This time, after making sure that the ropes were fast, he set the dark-lantern on the floor so that its round rays shot straight down the middle passage. Then he came to snarl at Buck.

"Has mamma's boy had a nice time all by his lonesome? Yah!" He slapped Buck heavily in the mouth, cutting his lips, then continued in the empty, flat tones of the degenerate insane. "Don't enjoy yourself thinking you are ever going down one of those three passages, even if they are fools enough to give the diamonds to the Jap and he is fool enough to bring them to me. Just to make sure you enjoy the play, I will give you a program. I figure they will send that other young —— —— Wheeler with the jewels, in the hope that he can make terms and get you out of my clutches. Fools! If they only will! When they come it will be along that passage. You can see 'em. And when I pull this cord the passage falls in behind 'em. That's the only outlet Wheeler knows, but when I once get my hands on him, he will take no interest in passages. I shall leave you two to amuse yourselves hunting a way out—for a few minutes—until I press a button at the outlet. So enjoy yourself for the few minutes left, and think what a time I shall have—Hong Kong, Petersburg, Paris! Time for that idiot, Kotura, and your friend Dan. I have a long score to

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settle with Dan. Yes, yes! Lis-ten! Hah!"

From afar there came echoing along the passage the careful closing of a metal door. A bobbing light came slowly nearer until the squat figure of the little Japanese came into plain sight in the near end of the passage. In the shadow close behind him was another dim figure. Buck's heart gave a jump and he wanted to shout a warning—but of what?

"Watch out, Dan! Keep close to the Jap. Snead is here."

His voice was smothered by a rumbling crash as the passage behind the Jap fell in. A cloud of dust was borne toward him on the rush of damp air driven in by the collapse of the passage.

"All right, Kotura," said Snead. "Now we're all tight and cosey. Walk right in, boys, and make yourselves at home. You will be here some time. What the ——?"

Surprized for the moment, he ran the round ray of his lantern up and down the stripped figure of Dan Wheeler as the Jap stepped aside.

"Why the full-dress? To show you are not armed? Very thoughtful! Pleased to meet you. I'm sure. What you grinning at, you green-eyed image? Lost what little sense you had?"

Cannily he regained control of himself, remembering how he had been twice defeated by letting go in a rage under Dan's contemptuous badgering.

"Pretty boy—sweet-pretty," he crooned. "Where's the necklace? That is the first business. Got it?"

"Here it is."

Dan had it in a wad in his hand and now he held it up to flare and flame in the direct lantern rays.

"You can't have it now, but get your other shiners, show us the way out and then you may have it."

"Certain-lee. Nothing simpler. Now won't that be nice? We'll see to you later. You won't get away. Come, Kotura. You have earned your wages and you may as well pass on."

Snead led the way, followed by the eager little Jap, to a large marble slab in the side-wall. Pointing to one of the large slabs of the floor next the wall, he said to the Jap—

"Stand there!"

The Jap obeyed.

"Face the wall!"

Snead stood on the other end of the floor-slab himself, with the result that the slab rocked a bit, evenly, releasing the foot of the slab in the side-wall. Snead pressed on the slab at one side and it swung inward, like the mirrors up-stairs, showing a narrow stair leading down, and a shelf on the left side of the opening.

"Pass me that box on the shelf. It's heavy. Don't drop it if you want to live."

The Jap passed him a heavy, steel, brass-bound box which Snead put on the floor at his side. At the same moment, while he was further directing Kotura, he darted a glance to make sure Wheeler was not near.

"Stand still! Lean over and feel farther along the shelf. You will find yours right—there!"

From his arm-pit, as he spoke, he had drawn a knife, and, with "there," he drove it to the hilt inside the Jap's collar-bone, downward toward the base of the neck. As the body wilted like a wet cloth, Snead thrust it forward with his foot. It disappeared with a splash. The light Kotura had borne went with it and Snead swung the stone into place quite easily, coldly remarking—

"Takes two to open it—of about the same weight—but one can close it."

As Snead spoke, the air from the opening came to Buck's nostrils, carrying a stench that made his hair creep and crawl, while his stomach turned with the certain instinct of repulsion. He tore his thoughts away, tried not to think. What was the demon saying now?

"YOUR turn next, Danny! Hand over that necklace! Time's getting short and my train goes in a few minutes. I don't want to shoot you. I prefer to let you claw about a few minutes with dear Buck after I have left and before I bury you alive together. Now the necklace!"

"You didn't bring your gun?" Dan professed surprize and amusement. "Too bad! Well, use the knife then. If you want the necklace, come and get it!"

Snead had darted at him before the words were out, and Dan had vanished from the shaft of light, springing toward Buck with feline grace and quickness.

"Pocket-knife?" he whispered and Buck answered—

"Trousers—right pocket."

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Dan had the knife out, had cut one of Buck's hands free and was away by the time Snead could see in the dark area.

"Come and get it!"

Again Dan held up the diamonds in the lantern-ray, quite close to the light, and Snead's eyes were held fascinated for a moment. Again Dan darted out of the light as Snead sprang at him. Again Snead was blind for a second after looking at the blazing jewels and, by the time he could see Dan in the shadow, Dan had freed Buck's other hand. The blade was too small for the big rope about Buck's body and Snead was upon him again.

Snead filled the air with filthy oaths as he realized that Dan was too fast on his feet, for he himself was still lame from the encounter in the card-room. He quickly caught up the lantern and turned it so that the ray shot directly at Buck. He had seen that Wheeler's plan was to cut Buck's bonds so that it would be two to one. He therefore so placed the light that he could dart into the darkness himself. Then, knife in hand, he began a dogged pursuit of the naked youth. For some time the two darted and dodged, flashing into and out of the light, but Dan easily eluded the older man, and each time he passed Buck he got another slash at the heavy rope where it passed from body to pillar.

Of a sudden Snead darted behind the lantern, placed the knife-haft along his palm and held it by his folded thumb. He had decided to finish Buck by throwing the knife through his heart or neck, knowing that to attempt to drive it home directly with his hand would give Dan a fatal chance for a stunning blow. Dan waited just in front and to one side out of the direct shaft of light that shone on Buck. Snead drew back his hand slowly and stopped. If Dan should catch the knife? He hesitated. Dan suddenly barked—

"Throw it!"

Snead's perverted nerve-centers could not inhibit the impulse and he let drive.

Along the level shaft of light the knife flashed like an arrow. Out of the dark flitted a white hand.

Click!

The knife had vanished from within two feet of Buck's heart.

Knife in hand, Dan felt its edge. He had not practised this catch for nothing, but he was not exultant, for he saw Snead had whipped off his coat and wound it into a heavy buffer around his left forearm. A past-master at knife-fighting, he might easily catch the blade in this wrapping, wrench it free, and, if he could fasten on Dan's wrist or ankle with his spring-steel fingers, it would be all over in a second, for Snead had inhuman strength and profound knowledge of disabling holds.

Yet Dan felt no fear. He was on edge with the keen lust for killing. It rose in him like a surge of resistless waters—an elemental power beyond him, yet, with it, he felt a warning. He must be wary and restrained lest he be blinded by desire—rushed into recklessness. He circled carefully for a chance to slash and get away—to bleed his man weak if possible.

In his busy work under Lon Cheng, learning the defensive moves against Snead's wicked strokes, he had learned one lesson well: He must keep free from the maniac's clutches, unless he had him weakened or enraged beyond control. He held in mind the horrid picture of the man in the saloon—a strong man transformed into a cringing, pitiful creature by a moment of Snead's handling. He must be alert and cool, seizing every chance to weaken, befog and torment his antagonist. It was his only hope.

"Lost your train already," he taunted, circling away from the light, "and you'll lose the next—and other things. You're a stupid brute anyhow—a fool!"

He heard Snead's hissing breath and knew he had scored. Snead was doing something to the lantern—slipping the slide that moved the reflector and spread the ray.

Dan leaped past him, flicked the knife-point across as Snead dodged. He caught him—only a scratch across the right arm, but the blood came quickly—and Snead charged with a guttural snarl. They circled, dodged, leaped and feinted in the dim light and darkness—a fantastic dance about Buck as a center, Dan still aiming at the heavy rope that seemed to resist the knife like wire, Snead working to get a grip of wrist or ankle—to crack the joints of this perfect body.

The thought suddenly struck Snead that he would blind Buck and he darted both thumbs at the bound man's eyes as he dodged before him. Dan's knife-hand was

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away from Snead, but, thinking in a flash, he swung his left and caught Snead's mouth with a jolt that shook the madman and cut his lips.

"Never liked that smile!" he taunted, poised to spring, as he severed a turn of the heavy rope with a back-stroke.

Buck's arms were free to the elbow and the color was returning to his hands, but he appeared dazed and benumbed by the dizzy devil-dance before him. In that flashing white figure he saw his only hope for life. He feebly worked his wooden fingers, gasping and praying under his breath as he followed the endless shifting struggle. Of a sudden he found his voice.

"You'll get him, old man, you'll get him! Legs! Watch out!"

He knew the meaning of the feigned slip, for Snead had appeared to lose footing and shot both feet toward Dan's ankles. A toe-hold behind the ankle and a stamp on the knee-cap meant a broken bone, a flopping leg and death for two.

Already Dan had leaped lightly forward, knowing better than to kick but making a back-hand sweep with the knife. Snead, apparently helpless, sprang erect, caught the blade in the folds of his buffer and clipped the wrist that held it in his steel fingers. Buck let out a sharp cry of horror as he saw Snead's shoulders heave with the powerful wringing twist that could tear an arm from its socket—provided the body did not turn with it.

Dan was already in the air with a wild, backward leap. The leverage of his forearm twirled him in the air and he curled in a ball for a back-somersault. At the timed moment his feet shot out straight, caught Snead in neck and chest and drove him staggering back into Buck's lap where Buck's half-free hand caught in Snead's collar and clung.

Dan had landed crouching. He saw Snead tear himself loose by dashing his fist in Buck's face as he twisted away, and, cat-like, Dan leaped once more at his dazed antagonist. Shoulder-high, he again drove his feet at Snead's chest, but Snead's twist whirled him out of range of the driving feet and he got only a chop in the neck from the edge of Dan's hand as Dan hurtled past and landed heavily, his head rapping the stone floor. He lay still.

"DAN! DAN!" shrieked Buck, heaving and tearing at his bonds.

Snead was still reeling from the shrewd neck-chop, gasping for breath and stupidly looking about the floor for the knife or any other missile. There was not even a broken brick.

"Dan! Oh, Dan!" yelled Buck again.

Dan rolled over and got to his knees in time to see Snead staggering toward him, working his claw-like hands. Close to Dan's knees stood the heavy steel treasure-chest. Slowly he drew back and slowly Snead crept on, each glaring as he crouched like a tiger for the spring. Suddenly Dan heaved up the heavy chest in both hands, driving it at the oncoming, ape-like creature. It caught Snead fair in the chest and Snead went down with it wrapped in his arms. He let it go, rolling on the floor as if in agony, and then looked up at Dan, who was cautiously coming nearer. Snead called weakly:

"I'm done! You wouldn't hit a man when he's down?"

One arm seemed to be doubled under him helplessly.

"I would!"

Dan leaped aside from the flashing knife that Snead's hand had encountered, and, with the words, Dan kicked the madman heavily in the stomach.

Snead rolled on the floor, breathing in sobbing gasps, rolling away from Dan until he came to the wall, where he crouched at bay, still holding the knife, still dangerous.

Dan's head was clearing now and he again picked up the metal chest.

"Wait!" Snead gasped hoarsely. "I'll trade with you, Wheeler. I can get out, and you can't unless I show you the way. Give me the chest and you can have the necklace, and I'll show you the way out. We'll leave that cub buried alive."

As he panted between the short sentences, he edged toward the collapsed passage, darting along it a furtive glance. Dan seemed to hesitate. Snead rasped:

"I got no time to fool with you longer. Stay and be buried, or give up the chest. Hand it to me!"

"Look out! The knife!" whispered Buck.

"Take your chest!"

Again Dan heaved it and Snead went down; the knife rang upon the stone floor.

Dan pounced upon the knife while Snead heaved himself up with the chest. He

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looked like an evil old rat as he sneaked along the wall, his face daubed with blood and dirt and his pale eyes darting about for a hole.

"Follow him, Dan!" yelled Buck. "It's your only chance. He can blow us up from above if he gets out."

"He will never get out!" snapped Dan.

Snead, however, was recovering his breath, and in his evil eyes there was a gleam of triumph. Once more wrapping the coat about his arm—the right this time—he shifted the chest under his left arm; then, with his old snarling grin, he leaped at Dan, struck him aside with the wrapped arm and darted into the collapsed passage.

Dan came crouching after, waited until Snead had turned to the right and pushed the swinging slap, and then sprang upon him from behind. One sure stroke drove the long blade down inside the collar-bone, exactly as Snead had knifed the Jap. With a long, gurgling sigh the maniac collapsed. As the fiendish grin faded from his face, Dan turned to Buck.

"I never did like that smile, anyway! That other necklace is behind you."

"And now," said Dan as he freed Buck from the rope, so knotted that every turn had to be cut, and picked up the necklace from where he had dropped it, "we'd better be moving. See those wires? From the way Snead looked, I have a notion there may be some clockwork connection like a time-clock, and that it's near the time for it to go off."

The wires led up into the darkness from the implanted blast in the base of the masonry.

"No time to poke about—bring the lantern!"

Dan picked up the chest as he spoke and opened the door in the side of the passage. It was a small door of wood, plastered and whitewashed to look like a part of the side wall.

"I knew about this passage all along. It leads to my rooms," said Dan, "but I didn't know Snead knew it. This was his great secret and a clever notion. He'd have stuck me in my sleep and, perhaps, made his getaway in my clothes."

Voluble with relief and glad to talk—to forget the long horror he had witnessed, Buck talked continually as they climbed the narrow, winding stair.

"Then there never was but the one way in or out—the basement tunnel I was dragged through—except this stair that opened into the same tunnel near the vault. It is the very last place where a man would look after the rest of the tunnel had collapsed."

The two had reached Dan's bedroom through the swinging mirror. Dan swung it back in place. Buck drew a long breath and turned to Dan.

"But what about that — about Snead's——"

He was interrupted by a muffled, heavy thud. The floor vibrated to the shock and the swinging mirror cracked and shivered in its frame.

"That's all about it," said Dan. "There is a man named Drake down-stairs waiting for us, but there never has been anybody named Snead. I expect your father is waiting for you, so shake it up!"

Buck was looking at Dan as if he thought the blow on his head had addled his wits, but at the mention of his father he was struck with remorse.

"Which way? Quick!"

He darted out and down the hall in the direction Dan pointed.

IX

"NOW, Eli, might 's well set down an' take it easy. No use prancin' round an' pawin' up the earth. 'T won't help any."

Uncle U purposely appeared unsympathetic in order to annoy his old friend, knowing that anything was better than the helpless fear that was gnawing at the banker's heart. The big man had walked the floor ceaselessly, watch in hand, biting his lips, stopping at the least noise that came to his strained ears, holding his breath, then pacing again with the sick dread ever heavier upon him.

"You never had a son," said the banker, looking at him with somber eyes.

Then he turned to step into the hallway and listen at the stairs leading down.

The long cruel half-hour had dragged itself out while the tortured man had gone over in his mind the chances that his son would have of coming back to him. He had asked repeatedly whether there was a possible place of access to the vault—a way to get help to the boys. Drake had even taken him to the basement and shown him

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the ruined passageway by which Dan and the Jap had gone, now a mass of broken stone and earth as it had collapsed behind them.

Back in the Oriental's room, it had been agreed that the only direction to look for the boys' return must be toward the front shop and the street entrance, for they must come, by way of Snead's secret outlet, into some other basement or alley. Still the banker kept one ear strained toward the hall and the basement stairs, while he kept his eyes on the open door at the front of the shop.

Again and again he had asked to be told about Snead's fatal skill in ju-jutsu and what chance young Wheeler had of holding his own in a man-to-man struggle with the homicidal maniac, why he could not have taken a gun with him, how long such a fight might last—anything his tortured mind could conjure up.

"Y'ought to see a go at that Jap game, Eli. Some o' them didoes 'd make ye think o' the old collar-'n-elbow wrastlin' we use' to do back in Vermont."

Uncle U tried hard to divert Brant's cramped attention.

"They make a feller throw himself-like, stan' himself on his ear, as 't were. You an' I use' to be pretty fair match at it, 'member?" Chewing more rapidly, as he saw Brant held his breath to listen to a street-noise, Uncle rambled on—" 'Member Paddy Dugan? Little sawed-off runt wa'n't more'n five-foot-two—stout and freckled. That little cuss use' to flop me—side-holt—fast as I c'd git up; an' I couldn't figger how he did it. Have 'im goin', I would, an', jest 's I 'd be fallin' top of 'im, somethin' 'd happen. The State o' Vermont 'd play me a dirty trick—up and slap me square 'n the back, an' there was Paddy on top o' me. An' good natured? Land o' love, that boy couldn't get mad! An' he did it so darn easy. I never did——"

"Forty minutes!" Brant's voice trembled and his lips twitched. "Do you think there's a chance left? They couldn't be all this time. Something has got to be done!"

He strode into the hallway, turned and came back to the little room, dropped into an easy-chair and covered his face with his hands. Uncle U stopped chewing, swallowed and got up to lay a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"It's a long time, Eli, but say! Listen to me! I got somethin' they call second-sight—born that way—an' I can't see it any way but thet Dan Wheeler finishes that dirty crook. You'll hear somethin' in a minute er two, and your boy will be comin'——"

"My boy—my boy!"

It was the same two words but the deep despair and yearning in the tones stopped the ranchman with a choke in his throat again.

"We can only make the best of it. I can't—Hark! What was that?"

The banker was on his feet, holding his breath, his face turned to the stair leading up. He took a long stride into the hall and stood at the foot of the stairs.

"Couldn't come that way," Uncle U whispered at his shoulder.

"Hark!" Brant shouted impatiently.

A door opened in the distance and at that instant the floor shook with a rumble like an earthquake.

Brant lifted up his big voice in a shout.

"Buck! Oh, Buck!"

A moment of taut silence followed and then, far but clear:

"Coming, dad, coming! All right, dad!"

"Oh—my—God!"

In deep, trembling tones, Brant lifted both hands as his legs gave way beneath him.

But Buck in the flesh brought him to his feet, unashamed of his tears, unashamed to wrap his man-child in his arms and feel that he was real and unharmed.

"How come ye're up on that floor?" Uncle U feigned an ordinary curiosity and looked up the stairs. "Where's Dan?"

"He's all right—in his room. It was the passage from his bed-room, Lon Cheng."

Buck addressed the calm Oriental over his father's shoulder.

Lon Cheng was not losing a word or a look and his eyes shone with a strange brightness.

"And Snead?" asked the Chinaman.

"Gone—and buried! Dan killed—Oh, dad, such a fight! Naked and bare-handed Dan fought the devil for hours. And Dan had a chance to get away. Instead, he fought. It seemed days and days, though it couldn't have been more than a few hours. He wore him down, knocked him down—outwitted and outfought him and—finished him. No other man—no other

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three men could have done it! And he's got all Snead's jewels—everything—in a chest up-stairs."

All three men had been drinking in the words and Brant, ten years younger, sprang up the stairs.

"Come on, Buck, and get him!" he called over his shoulder, then to the others—"We'll fetch him alive or dead, naked or clothed!"

They did, but Dan had got a bath-robe on the way. Dan, however, was mulish about giving details of the encounter. Buck's version seemed to give him so much pain that at last he lied to get away.

"I am cold, and if Buck and I are going with Uncle U, we have got to hurry.

"You Buck," his father charged him, "don't let that Wheeler person out of your sight, and when he is dressed you bring him here before you start for the train. Hear me?"

"I'll try, dad," said Buck over his shoulder as he ran after Wheeler. "I am all packed."

Brant, Cheng and Uncle U in the meantime made a hurried inventory of the contents of the box. They found jewels to double the amount of their wildest guesses. Uncle U found his watch intact and greeted it like a favorite relative. The banker took possession of his two necklaces, while Lon Cheng called Drake to witness that their united claims did not amount to one-third of the remainder. Here was an immense fortune with no owner, and the only rational claimants were Lon Cheng and Drake, as partners in a part of the enterprizes that had resulted in its assembling, and Dan Wheeler as the one who had rescued the stones along with Buck.

"No amount of money or diamonds can discharge my debt," Brant was saying when Buck came dragging Dan in, bag in hand, "but these two gentlemen are agreed that one half of the property you restored is rightly yours. Nobody has a better claim. It would be impossible to find the former owners of a tenth of these jewels, so it looks as if you were a tremendously rich man. I congratulate you. But, for saving my boy——"

The banker's voice failed him and, with lips pressed tight, he held out a strong hand to Dan.

"We are square, then," said Dan as he took the hand and held it. "That's just how I felt when you took me home with you. About that money," turning to the other two, "I have got fifteen hundred—never mind how I got it—in Mr. Brant's bank, and that's enough. When I need more I can get it. What to do with the rest of it I don't know. It gives me a headache to think about it. If you two can't agree, why not leave it to Mr. Brant to decide? That's his business—handling money.

"And now, Uncle U, we've got just time to get that train without running. Good-by, Mr. Brant. I'll take care of Buck. He's forgotten his handbag now."

DAN escaped by stepping into the hall while Buck ran for his bag. Whether it was a ruse to give Buck and his father a chance to say good-by or to get a few moments in the hallway alone is not known. In any case Dan slipped away to the rear end of the hallway where a curtained doorway had a strong attraction for him.

Was there a ripple of that curtain? Dan stepped closer, put out a hesitating hand and just then the curtain moved aside to reveal a face and eyes which were bright with many things.

"I am coming back—here," was Dan's best effort.

"I shall be waiting—be glad to see you. Good-by."

It was a small hand, firm and fragrant that Dan took and, bending over with the grace of a Galahad, lightly kissed. It was only when he felt it press upward against his lips, gently but surely, that he reddened, and when Dan blushed he made a thorough job of it.

"But why did you do it?" asked a soft voice.

"Why did I?"

"Why did you—you might have been killed!"

"Why, I don't know—I—it just had to be done. I—good-by! That's one reason why I did it—because I am coming back and——"

Here Buck's voice called—

"All ready, Dan?"

Dan dragged himself away from the curtain, saying over his shoulder with the queer little smile that showed only the edge of his white even teeth—

"And—I never did like that smile of his, anyway."

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GOOD-BY

(A Sailors' Chantey, to be Sung at the Capstan)

by **HARRY KEMP**

GOOD-BY to Dirty Kate's saloon.
(Walk 'er round)
As we slither past the last sand-dune.
Walk 'er round,
We're outward bound.

Good-by to all our friends in town.
(We're outward bound)
Our friends—while we had half a crown.
Walk 'er round,
We're outward bound.

Good-by to the rum that scrapes like wire.
(Walk 'er round)
And whisky with its claws of fire.
Walk 'er round,
We're outward bound.

Good-by to the gravestones on the hill.
(We're outward bound)
Above the town where we got our fill—
Walk 'er round,
We're outward bound.

Our fill of the kind that cry, "Give, give!"
(Walk 'er round)
Of the people that say, "We've got to live!"
Walk 'er round,
We're outward bound.

Good-by, till we come to get trimmed again.
(We're outward bound)
For it's always the way with sailor-men!
Walk 'er round,
We're outward bound.

For there's something about this going to sea,
(Walk 'er round)
That makes a fellow big and free.
Walk 'er round,
We're outward bound.

So lean on your bars and walk 'er round;
(We're outward bound)
There's a good stiff wind, and we're outward bound!
Thank God, boys, we're outward bound!
Walk 'er round,
We're outward bound.

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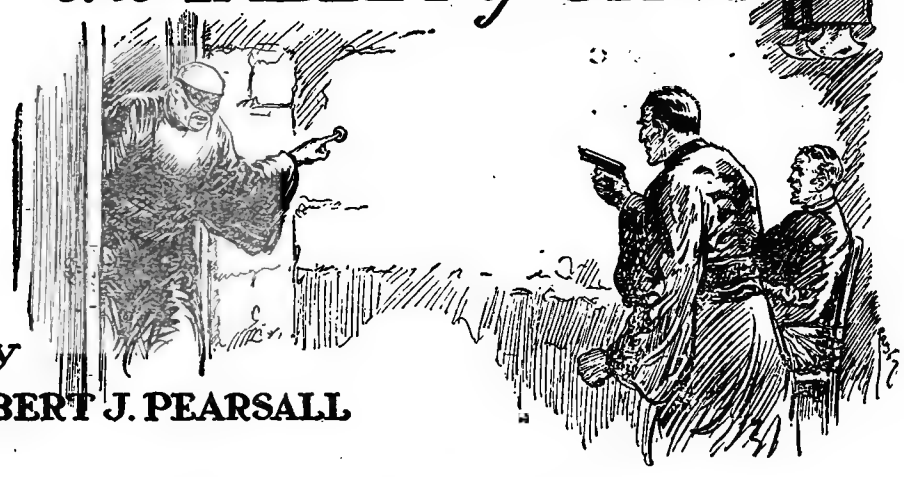
The TABLET of SHUN



by
ROBERT J. PEARSALL

Author of "The Wizardry of Fear," "The Eight Vultures of Kwang-Ho," etc.

I SUPPOSE no one has known complete epicurean luxury until he has loitered through a Chinese dinner. I'm also quite sure that no Westerner, eager to be on a vital errand, has otherwise learned the full torture of enforced delay. If it was merely to tax my nerves that Ho Whan held me to his hospitality before taking me to Hazard, he succeded admirably.

Now and then a ripple of uneasiness, of disappointed expectancy, seemed to break the surface of the mandarin's Oriental phlegm, hinting to me that he had some other purpose. In any case I couldn't escape without openly expressing my doubt that he was acting under instructions from Hazard, and to do that would probably destroy altogether my chance of getting to Hazard.

Since we had begun our search for Koshinga, head of the lawless and revolutionary Ko Lao Hui, Hazard and I had brothered each other in many perils and, I think, with some courage. From the moment of his broken appointment with me that afternoon at the Tea-House of the Many Winds, however, fear had held me by the throat. That fear had not been lessened a whit by the arrival, a few minutes later, of Ho Whan's courier.

There were three reasons for this. We knew ourselves always in peril, marked for death by the Ko Loa Hui, and the break in Hazard's plan was at least an indication that he had been overtaken. Furthermore, it was a definite rule of ours never to send word to each other through any one whom we hadn't agreed was to be trusted.

Our first distrust of Ho Whan, acting governor of Shensi, had increased each of the four days we pursued the seemingly hopeless task he had insisted that we undertake—the recovery of a mysteriously important bronze tablet stolen from his *yamen*. So, from the moment I received it, I had been convinced that the purported message the courier bore, saying that Hazard needed me and that Ho Whan would take me to him, was but bait to lead me into a Ko Lao Hui trap.

The bait, however, I apparently swallowed without suspicion. If danger there was, Hazard—by the logic of his broken appointment—was probably already caught. If he still lived, he needed me, and I, at least, would have the advantage of walking into the trap open-eyed. I did what I believed Hazard would have done had our postions been reversed.

As a consequence, it was very small enjoyment I got out of the meal Ho Whan urged upon me under the pretext that the time fixed by Hazard for our meeting hadn't yet arrived. I managed, I think, at least to match Ho Whan's broken placidity and to go through the twenty-seven courses

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from seeds and nuts to bird's-nest soup with an appearance of zest. I managed, too, to utilize the delay to analyze the situation still further. It was a process that gave me small comfort. I thought I saw how I could, before going any further, either confirm or dispel my belief in Ho Whan's treachery.

When the last dish was gone and the last servant had left us, I put aside my eagerness to be on my way to Hazard and placidly lit the cigaret Ho Whan handed me. It seemed to me, though it was hard to read his worldly old face, that he regarded my changed attitude with some surprize and a little relief. The impression I had got during the meal, that he was expecting some one who didn't come, still persisted.

He had no excuse to offer, however, and he made as if to get up.

"Now," he said, "the *yang whan* will please come with me, as his honorable friend has desired."

I pretended not to notice his movement.

"My friend has another desire," I said, "of which I have thought while humbly eating food. It is a desire which I also share, for it is important that we soon leave your honorable city. As you know, we were about to depart when you asked our mean assistance concerning the tablet that has been stolen from your honorable safe."

"I owe much to your condescension in remaining," he bowed.

"Then you will aid us to complete our work and depart," I suggested, "by explaining to us the importance of the tablet, that we may know where to look for the thief."

It was a request we had made several times before but which he had always evaded. It was this evasion that had first made us suspect that he was playing a double game. Perhaps, Hazard had suggested, Ho Whan had his own reason for wanting to keep us in Sian-fu. It was true that our donkeys had been loaded to leave when Ho Whan's runner had found us.

Ho Whan seemed to hesitate before answering.

"It is a secret of great age that you ask me. I have given you certain signs by which the tablet may be known. That is all I can tell you."

I stretched myself with a pretense of weariness, blew several smoke rings and meditatively studied the sparsely bearded, flabby-cheeked face opposite me. It was inscrutable only as to his present thoughts, for life leaves its marks even on the features of a Chinese mandarin.

Ho Whan's slant eyes were narrow and calculating; his thin lips were like a trap, and his high but receding forehead, arched nose and brutal jaw were the danger signs of a ruthless ambition—an ambition that hadn't yet been fulfilled, for his present position was but a temporary one and would end with his chief's return from Peking.

"Nevertheless, I must tell your Excellency this," I said. "My companion and I have persuaded ourselves that it is necessary we have the information I ask. Without it, our mean wits are helpless and it is our intention humbly to withdraw from your business."

Ho Whan's face did not change, but his plump hands, resting lightly in the silken folds that half-concealed the lines of his rather gross body, stirred a little.

"It is a question that will receive my attention," he replied smoothly. "Meanwhile, will you permit me obediently to lead you to your friend, as he has requested?"

"That will be unnecessary," I asserted decisively, "unless you give me this information. Wheels turn and time passes. If we are to leave Sian-fu in the morning, there are certain things that must be done. My companion and I have agreed on this, and he will know where to find me."

I awaited his answer in considerable suspense. It was the test I had conceived to discover his intentions—the corroboration of my suspicions. I could think of no reason he should now tell me a thing he had heretofore refused to tell, unless he were convinced that I would very shortly be past repeating it.

"It is well," he said after a moment's thought. "I will tell you, knowing you will not let the secret escape. The tablet that has been stolen is the tablet of Shun of which you may have heard."

It happened that I had, but I could use what I had heard very well to check the truth of what he told me.

"I have heard of the good Emperor Shun," I replied. "I have never heard of his tablet."

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"Then I will tell you," said Ho Whan, "and you will understand what an evil thing it would be if this tablet passed from the possession of the republic."

IN A WAY the story he told me—which proved to be the same story I had been told many times before—was a remarkable one. Still, it is no more remarkable than many other things in Chinese history. In a sense, it furnishes a key to all the others—an explanation, for instance, of how a system of government managed to endure four thousand years under varying dynasties, without a change.

There is no doubt that the Chinese have been a backward-looking race, worshiping tradition, revering the past and only recently turning their faces toward the sunrise. That they are a frugal, hard-limbed, indomitable race, true to life and to themselves and worthy of all help in their present effort to get out of the bog of the ages, is also true.

It is a fact that the average lower-class Chinese of the interior provinces will today bow lower before the names of Yao and Shun than before any deity. Perhaps it is because they were China's first recorded rulers that they are credited with such greatness. Their words are still golden, as their reigns are attributed to have been golden.

The tablet that had been stolen contained a complete record of their combined wisdom, set down by the Emperor Shun upon imperishable bronze. It was a formula for perfect government, as the inscriptions on the tablets of Confucius are a formula for perfect morality, but it was something else, too.

"It is also said," went on Ho Whan, "that the Emporor Shun petitioned Heaven asking that this tablet of wisdom should never pass into other hands than those of China's rightful rulers. Many believe that Heaven granted this request. Of a consequence it follows that to them the possession of the tablet is a sign of the right rule. Is it plain now why its disappearance is a matter of concern?"

"Perfectly," I said.

In truth, other things had become plain, too. To discover who will profit by a crime is often to discover the criminal, and I believed it wouldn't be hard for me now to place my hand upon the thief, or to name those for whom he had stolen.

"But," I went on, "surely the Manchus must have discredited this teaching."

"On the contrary, it was a part of their strength that they used it. The tablet passed from the Mings to the Chings as a sign of power. Indeed, it was the Ching empress, Tzu-hsi-tuan, who brought the tablet to Sian-fu a third of a cycle ago."

This also coincided with what I had already heard, a Chinese cycle being sixty years, and the date thus approximately set being that of the Boxer trouble during which the Manchu empress had indeed fled to Sian-fu. Fearful and suspicious of the foreigners in the East, she had upon returning to Peking, left the venerable tablet under the vermilion seal in the governor's *yamen* at Sian-fu, only to have both *yamen* and tablet taken over by the young Chinese Republic in 1911.

A year ago, Ho Whan went on to say, it had been placed in a modern safe—the only one in Sian-fu—from which it had been stolen. It was a time safe, and Hazard and I had learned from others than Ho Whan that it was never opened save in the presence of Ho Whan and his secretary, Shen Yun, a rather dissipated young man who had won his nickname of "the fast one" by other excesses beside his devotion to gambling.

Ho Whan had described the tablet well enough. It was about a foot and a half high and a foot wide, rounded at the top like a grave-slab, with its edges and face covered with small Chinese characters of the first dynasty. But more information we had not been able to get, either from Ho Whan or his subordinates, hence our condition of puzzlement. To open the safe would have required an expert cracksman, and it was hard to imagine how an expert cracksman could have been developed in Sian-fu.

"It is indeed a serious crime," I said gravely after Ho Whan had finished. "But it must be plain that your honorable information will assist us greatly in finding the thief."

"It is to be hoped you will succeed," replied Ho Whan with what I took to be an unconscious touch of derision.

I put that down as one other bit of evidence against him. I was now sure that

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he himself was the thief, probably in conjunction with Shen Yun, and that he had stolen for the Ko Loa Hui. It seemed clear that the theft of the potent tablet could have no other motive than a political one; there was no other revolutionary body in Shensi than the Ko Loa Hui. Also, if Hazard was a prisoner, as I was convinced, he must be in the hands of the Ko Loa Hui, since we had no other enemies. In using my concern for Hazard to bait me into a similar extremity, Ho Whan was proving himself one of them.

In that case, there was no doubt that death waited for me not far ahead, but one may sometimes dodge the swing of the reaper's scythe. I had reason to believe that the Ko Loa Hui wouldn't kill either Hazard or myself instantly. The head of the society had too fertile an imagination; he would be sure to conceive us the possessors of some knowledge worth extorting.

"I thank your Excellency," I said, "and I am now ready to go with you."

Ho Whan seemed to hesitate, and the slightest flicker of annoyed perplexity crossed his face. I wanted to get away now while he remained perplexed. I had no way of guessing whom or what he expected, but a break in his plans couldn't hurt me and might be of help, so I stood up and waited.

"It is well," he said after a moment and followed my example.

Presently he had bowed me out of his living-room and we were passing through his three small dingy and coarsely painted anterior courts infested with such vicious-looking hangers-on that I was reminded of the saying that "dead men should keep out of hell, and living out of *yamens*."

Certainly a justice-loving mandarin wouldn't surround himself with such friends. I noticed in the outer courtyard several groups playing fantan, dice and turn-over in direct violation of Chinese law. Indeed, Hazard and I had discovered during the course of our investigations that Shen Yun, the governor's secretary, was a very good patron and a good loser at these games.

As we started through the front gate into the street, four uniformed servants ran out of the porter's room to attend Ho Whan.

He ordered them back, not to my surprize; nor was it a matter of wonder that he waved aside the green palanquin that always waited his use outside the *yamen*. Evidently this was a matter for the plebeian and non-curious rickshaw men. Presently I was being hauled by one of them, behind Ho Whan, up the swarming street to the north, to some place muttered by Ho Whan into the ear of his coolie. I I was filled with a mixture of feelings in which fear was predominant, for I had no illusions as to the utter ruthlessness of the enemies into whose hands I was passing. I was excited, too—elated and expectant—and that for a reason I haven't yet stated.

For more than six months Hazard and I had been trying with all our energies and with only incidental deviations, to discover and, if possible, to destroy the sinister Koshinga around whose evil and mysterious personality the whole Ko Loa Hui movement revolved. That very morning when Hazard had set out to investigate still further, along lines he hadn't defined, the loss of the tablet, I had been commissioned to trace down a rumor we had heard to the effect that Koshinga was on his way to Sian-fu.

I'd been more succesful than I had hoped, thanks to some incautious talk in a tea-shop. Koshinga had arrived in Sian-fu that morning. Given that knowledge, it was an easy enough guess that his subtle intelligence was behind all that had happened. I was sure that he, as well as Hazard, waited for Ho Whan and me, at the end of the rickshaw trail.

II

THEREFORE, as my rickshaw tailed Ho Whan's closely through the measureless bewilderment and barbaric human clamor of Sian-fu's business section, an eager curiosity alleviated my natural dread of what was to follow. Both rickshaw men, hopeful concerning the fares of two such unusual passengers, ran mightily, shrilly and disrespectfully ejaculating to whomever got in their way. As we passed into the center of the district these cries became continual. Wayside chow stands, peddlers' stalls, itinerant cobblers, dentists, chiropodists, barbers and the like, with their equipment, so reduced the width of the already narrow streets, that it was only by a miracle of patience combined with extreme effort, that the two lines of traffic made way at all.

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It was a kaleidoscopic scene in which blue-clad, brazen-lunged foot passengers, bumping Chinese carts, carefully borne Sedan chairs, hurrying, jostling rickshaws, lusty coolies singing under their heavily loaded shoulder-poles, wheelbarrows, packhorses, donkeys and ramshackle wagons, all seemed mingled in hopeless confusion.

Wrangling vociferously and cheerfully, however, every one found his own way at last.

It was really an example of the patient endurance of the Chinese race, and of its indifference to physical discomfort and hindrances, that has become a national trait. Yet it was only an outward indication as the frothing surface of a stream of life no white man has been able to plumb. There are mysteries enough in our own streets—it is what makes life worth while—but this was to me all mystery. There are certain things I've learned about the sons of Han that are admirable, and lesser things that are gross, but I'm never caught in a flood of their traffic but I feel myself lost amid the unimaginable.

Those who have lived in China in the years preceding any uprising know that even there coming events cast their shadows before. In the midst of this venerable confusion which has lasted three milleniums, I thought I caught a new, clear note of trouble. My rickshaw coolie was jostled more than he should have been, and there were fleers and jeers at me, the "coarse-haired foreign devil," from many passers-by. The feeling these things indicated had seemingly sprung up overnight, and I should have suspected the reason for it even if I hadn't presently been given a sure clue.

In the middle of a small vacant place where a building had recently been burned, stood a street-singer surrounded by the inevitable crowd of slant-eyed humanity. We passed him quickly, the street being comparatively clear at this point, but I wished it had been crowded. I should have liked to hear more of the half-narration, half-prophecy which the singer was chanting to the intently listening crowd.

"From the dim darkness
Comes now a mighty one,
Giver of power to the children of Han;
Foretold, his greatness,
Son of the master's son,
Blood of all races and ruler of men.
"Once he struck lightly,
Dazed were the *kwei tzu*,
Driven in fear from the land of the north;
Twice he struck lightly,
Fell then the Manchu,
Full then your wells were of ——"

We were well past him, and the rest of the story-song was drowned in an unusual burst of clamor caused by a bridal palanquin, preceded by a train of boys bearing lanterns and men blowing trumpets and pounding drums. Ho Whan, a few yards ahead of me, must have heard the song but he did not turn his head.

The phraseology left no doubt that the hero of the fellow's eulogy was Koshinga. The hint as to his reputed ancestry was plain, for it was a very strange legend that surrounded Koshinga's antecedents and, to a great extent, gave him his power. If the horrible-featured little image which Hazard and I possessed were indeed, as it was supposed to be, a replica of the reputed superman's face, then the blood of all races was actually mingled in him. It was that attribute that really made him, in a way, a symbol of world dominion to his followers.

As to the historical references of the story-song, they were plain enough, making due allowances for the exaggeration of propaganda. It had indeed been the Ko Loa Hui, headed by Koshinga, that had struck the fiercest blows both in the Boxer uprising and in the rebellion that had stripped the Manchus of power.

The thing he was planning now might easily prove a greater disaster. Of course, his advertised promises of world conquest to his followers were absurd—false patriotism, tinder for foolish, excitable minds, and no doubt useful in the bleeding of the ignorant of money for his war fund. The end of his preachment of racial hatred, however, might easily be the massacre of all foreigners in China, the irretrievable ruin of the struggling republic and the exciting against the hapless Chinese race of the wrath of all the world.

This propaganda of his was nation-wide, there being no province in China over which the sucking tentacles of the Ko Lao Hui were not flung. Koshinga himself remained a mystery. As yet, Hazard and I had not met any one who would admit having seen him. He was simply a vivid personality hidden behind an impenetrable

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yellow cloud through which now and then his lightnings struck. Thus, safeguarding his life by invisibility, he increased his power, for the ignorant of no race love that which appeals to their understanding. A grisly fantom formed in the dark—such was Koshinga to the Ko Lao Hui, and most blindly did they obey him.

Now, if my reasoning were correct, I was to meet him. I was to be able to discover whether he were the true Koshinga, deracialized, brutalized of feature and bred for power as legend painted him, or the imposter that Hazard and I suspected. I was to have at least a chance at his life, and not even the knowledge that I was being led straight into a trap prepared by him, altogether dimmed my eagerness. Of a sudden I was afraid of losing my leader. I leaned over and warned my rickshaw man to close up the distance between me and Ho Whan.

VERY soon we had passed from the business section into the quieter but very narrow and crooked residence streets bordered by one-story, mud-walled houses placed close together. Finally we came to that gate in the north wall just to the east of the junction with it of the wall which divides the old-time Manchu and Mohammedan cities. Here a tinkling caravan of camels, sponge-footed and sprawling of gait, helped congest the traffic. By dint of much jostling and shouting, our coolies gained on the mass of outgoing vehicles, and at last we were through the gate and in the northern suburb.

There was a short stretch through a district of upper-class residences with large courtyards and green trees above which rose the curled roofs of yellow-tiled temples, pagodas and a distant tower or so. I knew we hadn't much farther to go, for just ahead of us was the Ching River dotted by the curious brown sails of junks and larger *kwadses* flapping like tattered window-blinds.

It was before a high-arched gate in a wall paralleling that river that Ho Whan's rickshaw finally stopped.

Ho Whan was already on the ground when my coolie drew up, and as I climbed out of my rickshaw he gave me his hand.

"It is here your exalted friend awaits your honorable coming," he said.

His courtesy was perfect—so perfect that I shivered a little. However, I tried to match it, and presently we had passed a kotowing gatekeeper and went into a well-kept outer compound with a floor of pounded clay about which were set many vases of well-kept shrubs and flowers. Another gate led us into a second compound; then we passed through several dwelling-rooms in the rear, the walls of which were hung with scrolls containing drawings of landscapes and the mottoes of ancient sages. Everywhere were rather stupid-looking servants whose abject deference to him convinced me that Ho Whan was a frequent visitor here.

I could have done well without some of Ho Whan's courtesy. Particularly I could have dispensed with his insistence that I, being his guest, should precede him through the long corridor behind the dwelling-rooms. I couldn't afford, however, to betray my distrust of him by disputing the rules of ceremony — not yet, at least. With a slight chill at my heart and with my right hand instinctively hitching toward the revolver that still lay hidden in the bosom of my gown, I went ahead.

We came out upon a compound at the rear of the residence—an ornamental garden, the farther wall of which abutted upon the river embankment. It was a place of well trimmed grass, filled with flower beds, fantastic arbors and vines trained over covered passages. At the rear of this garden, close to the wall, was a small red temple with wonderfully scrolled cornices and roof. The whole effect was beautiful and I forced an admiring exclamation.

Ho Whan bowed acknowledgment, but I saw that his face had gone grim and that he was keeping his right hand in a pocket of his gown. He seemed to grip something which was concealed by the folds of the silk. We walked side by side to the door of the temple, but here he again paused and waited for me to go ahead of him.

It was here I should have done what I had planned to do — dispose of him as silently as possible and continue alone. I felt sure I was now very near whatever awaited me, but I hesitated until we were inside the temple and out of observation—which is to say I waited too long.

Ho Whan outguessed me. As I entered the door, coming face to face with a meditative Buddha on a low wooden pedestal, I

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felt what could only be the muzzle of a pistol pressed against my spine.

"Behind Sakayamuni (Buddha of the Past) you will find steps leading downward," said Ho Whan in a purring voice from which all pretense of friendship had suddenly departed.

It was unlucky that he should have divined the exact moment at which I meant to act, but now I had no choice other than to obey him. Pretending not to feel the pressure on my back, I rounded the clay image sacred to the precious past and, with some foreboding as to the still more precious future, found the steps he had indicated. Ordinarily there was a trap door over them but this was now flung back. I started down the steps which extended backward under the Buddha.

Ho Whan kept close behind me. I counted the steps as we descended; there were fifteen of them. I realized that we must be almost as many feet under the river surface. At the bottom, in the pitch dark, I stood puzzled, but Ho Whan reached past me and opened a door.

"I have said I would lead you to your friend," he reminded me with a touch of derision, "also that your friend needed you."

As the door swung open, I called through it into the well lighted room:

"Hazard! Oh, Hazard!"

Hazard's voice, calm and quite unanxious, came from the room like an echo:

"Partridge! Is it you?"

I stepped forward into the chamber, which was a small one, and upon the rock walls of which many candles were bracketed. My eyes flashed in the direction from which Hazard's voice had come, and for a moment I saw nothing but him.

He was bound by stout cords around his trunk and hips to the back of an armless, Chinese chair which stood against the wall to my right. He sat erect and in an easy pose, his slender, well kept hands resting lightly near his knees, his close-cropped, student's head flung back, and an expression of little more than thoughtful interest on his youthful, smooth-shaven and unsophisticated-looking face.

Over his head was something that puzzled me—something like a rectangular envelope of sheet iron from the lower end of which two sharp-edged things like headsmen's axes projected downward at about the width of a man's shoulders apart. I'd just seen this when a slow, heavy voice interrupted me in English:

"You are welcome."

I turned in a flash, and as my eyes met two others that gleamed across the room at me through slits in a black mask, a sudden shock tingled through my body from head to foot. I knew it was Koshinga, and yet there was nothing of him visible but those coldly malicious eyes. Otherwise, he was merely a huge figure draped in black, a color which blended into the dark wall against which he stood, making his stature seem that of a giant.

Sometimes high excitement makes for detailed clarity of observation. Instantly I saw that just to Koshinga's right there was a wooden frame set in the wall, and in that frame a door, and that just to his left a small black button projected from the stone.

He bowed and spoke again. There was something terrifying in the slow, mocking movement and the powerful, passionless voice.

"I had been telling your friend that you would come," he said.

III

"FOOLS," said Koshinga, "to attempt to balk me. Mere helpless flies that might have sported in the sunlight if you had not conceived the idea of blocking the wheels of destiny. But even flies may become troublesome. You yourselves forced me to turn my attention to you."

"Thank you!" I said with an attempt at irony.

Near-god though he might be to millions his calm assumption of infinite superiority was decidedly irritating. There was no denying, however, that he had us down and done for; it wasn't a moment for anger but for quick counsel and action, if action were possible, and I tore my half-fascinated eyes away from Koshinga and turned to Hazard.

Hazard's calmness really meant nothing; I couldn't imagine him otherwise, whatever our plight. I knew, nevertheless, that my jeopardized life counted for at least as much with him as his own, so it was hopeful that he'd showed no regret at sight of me. It seemed to me, as our eyes met, that he flung me a reassuring look.

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"I'm sorry, Partridge," he said, but without emotion. "Don't trouble explaining; I know how you came here. I figured you'd come. As for me, I was drugged in our own house with my own food——"

"—prepared by your own hands," completed Koshinga.

I imagined him smiling sardonically behind his mask.

"But," he went on, "you did not notice that each of your eggs was pin-pricked. If you had not known something I want to know, I would have so impregnated your body with poison that it would have killed the scavenger worm."

"That's very probable," agreed Hazard easily. "Well, Partridge, as I was saying, I guessed they would trap you. If I had known where to find you when I discovered Ho Whan's connection with the Ko Lao Hui, we might have missed all this."

I felt the muzzle of Ho Whan's revolver suddenly jammed harder against my back. It was my first intimation that the double-dealing mandarin understood English, but it was an intimation of something else, too. Evidently the knowledge that his duplicity toward us had been discovered even before Hazard had been drugged and bound both startled and alarmed Ho Whan.

I wondered what object Hazard had in bringing this fact out. There were few things he did without reason, this imperturbable friend of mine. But just then I happened to glance again toward the curious contrivance that projected downward from the ceiling above Hazard's head, and everything else was driven out of my mind by a really horrible discovery.

The two sharp-edged, ax-like things that jutted out from the sheet-iron sleeve had moved perceptibly downward. Indeed, they were moving now, creeping very slowly but smoothly and steadily out of their sheath. The lower cutting edges were about three feet above Hazard's shoulders which I figured they would reach in about half an hour. Plainly the thing was an instrument of torture and death as devilish as even the Asiatic—who isn't so much cruel as dull-nerved, and hence incapable of understanding acute suffering—has ever invented.

I really hadn't the excuse of the unexpected, for some sort of torture was quite in the cards as I'd read them, but there was something so relentless in the slow downward creeping of those brutal tools that I suppose I changed color. Anyway, Hazard recalled my attention by laughing lightly.

"Eastern ways, Eastern manners!" he explained. "It's not a cheerful thing to sit under, I'll admit. Koshinga assures me those knives can be adjusted, much as a butcher's bacon-slicer.

"I go first and then you. That is, unless we'll tell Koshinga something he wants to know—something concerning which there's nothing to tell. A pleasant prospect, but Koshinga has mercifully been taking my mind off it," he went on fluently, "by telling me the story of the infernal tablet that got us, in a way, into this mess. Have you heard it yet?"

It wasn't like Hazard to thus deftly take the conversation under his control. Usually he let me do most of the talking. I wondered at what he could be driving, or was I wrong in supposing he had any plan at all? The thought came to me that he might be merely trying to distract his mind from the inevitable, but I rejected that suspicion instantly. Quick-witted and indomitable, Hazard would never despair, nor would I, while he lived.

"I got the story from Ho Whan before coming here," I replied.

"I suppose there's a chance that the two versions are the same," Hazard sneered, as if he disbelieved it.

I thought they very probably were, and the next instant Koshinga expressed my reason for so thinking.

"Of what use," he inquired coldly, "is it to lie to those who are about to die? The tablet is the tablet of Shun, maker and namer of kings, and it will be worth to me a million soldiers. Has my servant brought it with him?" he asked Ho Whan in Shensian.

Ho Whan stirred behind me, the muzzle of his gun shifting uncomfortably in the folds of my gown, and it seemed to me there was a slight faltering in his voice as he replied:

"Your humble slave thought it wisest to leave the honorable tablet in the hands of Shen Yun, who, as you know, is one of us and who will soon be here. I myself must deal with this *tu fei* (earth evil)—" he prodded me sharply—"who might have been dangerous."

"It is well," replied Koshinga. "You

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have proved yourself one who obeys intelligently and worthy of greater tasks than the capture of two *yangyen* (goatmen). I asked only that you detain them in Sian-fu till I arrived; you yourself devised the means. You shall be rewarded."

"He who rules is kind to his servant," replied Ho Whan.

I reflected that Ho Whan had indeed behaved rather cleverly. Not only had he held us for Koshinga but, by employing us to search for the tablet, he had pretty well destroyed the possibility that he would later be suspected as the thief. Hazard and I had by now some little reputation in western China among the official class, and it would hardly be supposed that a guilty man would hire us to detect his own guilt. On the other hand, our movements had accustomedly been so erratic that one more mysterious disappearance would hardly be noticed, which is to say that Ho Whan stood in no danger of being accused of our death.

IT WAS very difficult even to imagine a way of escape from this death—so difficult that I gave it up and set my wits to contriving escape from the fiendish instrument of torture, which really was but a mechanical variation of *singhchi* (lingering death), the means long used by the Manchus for extracting information and misinformation from prisoners.

For myself, this was simple. I had the means of self-destruction inside my gown. Rather, I had the means of forcing Ho Whan to shoot me, which I knew he would do instantly if I moved for my gun. That, in a way, would be a cowardly desertion; I would leave Hazard to suffer alone. On the other hand, if there was a diversion of some sort, if I could get free from the deadly contact of Ho Whan's revolver for but an instant— I racked my brain in vain to conceive a way.

While I was thus desperately breaking my hopes against the wall of impossibility, Koshinga amused himself by jeering venomously at me for allowing myself to be trapped as I had been. It seemed he had felt sure I'd suspect Hazard's peril and had deliberately played upon what he called the "weak sentimentality of friendship." I suppose it was only natural that he should hate all sentiments other than that of self-seeking in the same proportion that he had renounced them.

"Yet," he went on, "I have it in my mind to give you both a merciful death. Yes, I will promise it if you will do as I have commanded."

Save that Hazard had pronounced it impossible, I was still in the dark as to what he wanted. I glanced inquiringly at Hazard.

"I think your coming was quite convenient after all," said Hazard in his even, analytical voice. "You know my belief that there's a way out of any predicament. It's at least a rule to which there can be but one exception in any man's life, and that makes it a sounder rule than most. Now in this case, the way Koshinga has in his mind for us to escape torture is blocked, but there must be another way."

Knowing Hazard, I interpreted his speech as a carefully veiled hint to hold myself in readiness for—what? I didn't know, couldn't imagine, but it was with slightly revived hope and increased alertness that I turned to Koshinga.

"What is it you want?" I asked directly.

"I command," he replied, "that you write on a piece of paper the names of the men that have employed you to work against me. Your companion will do the same; it is for that his hands have been left free. If these names are the same on both your papers, I will know they are the true ones; and by pressing harder on this button—" he indicated the button at his left hand— "I will give your companion the boon of the swift death of the falling weight—after him, you."

"And if we tell you there are no such persons?"

"Your companion has already said so and I know he has lied. If you both continue to lie, you will die by the cutting knives which are driven by the same weight."

"But it is the truth," said Hazard.

It was the truth, but of course I knew he didn't expect to make Koshinga believe it. To every one the world is a sort of mirror in which he sees nothing that isn't in himself. It would have been useless to tell Koshinga that in fighting him we were actuated by anything but self-interest. Of course, in a way, it was self-interest— we felt a natural zest in the bigness and strangeness of the adventure—but it is a

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fact that our principal motive was a real friendship for the Chinese race and a firm conviction that Koshinga, self-styled patriot though he was, was his own country's most dangerous enemy.

"You will speak differently in half an hour," said Koshinga, glancing at that thing coming down upon Hazard's shoulders.

"Perhaps," said Hazard, "yet——"

HE GAVE me one sharp, spurring look that riveted my attention, then glanced past me at Ho Whan and back at Koshinga.

"Your servant, Ho Whan, planned things well," he said; "too well, in fact. Maybe the trick he used to hold my friend and me in Sian-fu was a little too clever. Simpler methods usually work better, as you should know."

"What do you mean?" asked Koshinga, his heavy, monotonous and indescribably soulless voice rising a little with its first touch of anger.

"Why, I'm coming back to the tablet that's so valuable. You haven't placed your hands on it yet. What if we had actually succeeded in the task Ho Whan set for us? What if we actually did succeed, and Ho Whan has lied to you?"

That was a most astonishing supposition for three of us. Koshinga's face, that I would have given so much to see, was hidden behind his black mask, and Ho Whan was out of my sight entirely, but the muzzle of his revolver jerked nervously, and Koshinga's whole huge body seemed to tense. As for me, a sort of tingling perplexity shot through every nerve. What could Hazard's suggestion mean?

"Ho Whan has the tablet," replied Koshinga harshly, "for he knows that no man lies to me and lives."

"Nevertheless——" began Hazard confidently; then, master of his voice as he was always of his every faculty, he checked himself and changed to a tone of simple exposition.

"It's plain to me," he went on, "how valuable the tablet would be to you. There's no race so swayed by symbols as the Chinese; consider their thousands of temples and countless images. And there's no race so swayed by reverence for the past. Consider, then, a symbol that's been handed down from the time of Shun and that bears with it Shun's authority for rulership over four hundred million people—an authority, too, that's been sanctioned by four thousand years of custom. What punishment would be too great for the man who held possession of that tablet for you—and who lost it through carelessness?"

During this speech the atmosphere of the little room had become very tense. Koshinga's small, wide-set eyes were now glittering with rage as if actual lightnings were about to dart from them. I couldn't understand Hazard's motive. Why increase Koshinga's anger and Ho Whan's venom against us by a half-accusation that couldn't be proved?

"He who rules will not consider what the *yangyen* says!" cried Ho Whan, a great fear in his voice. "Shen Yun has the tablet and will be here with it. It was my duty to bring this man; his to bring the tablet."

"Should he not be here by now?" asked Hazard evenly. "Should he not, in fact, have come with you?"

The thrust seemed to have force, for I heard Ho Whan catch his breath. Evidently he was by no means sure of himself; in fact he was terrified, and when I remembered his nervousness in the *yamen*, his apparent expectancy of some one who hadn't come, my heart leaped with a half-realization of the situation. What if he had lost the tablet? What if——

Koshinga, still glowering at Hazard, was speaking with a forced resumption of calmness.

"If the tablet is not forthcoming, Koshinga will know whom to hold responsible. Now I have this to say to you. There is the slow torture and the swift death. You will choose. It does not matter, for in the end you will do as I say. There is no man who can hold out against the slow torture."

"I've said we have nothing to tell," replied Hazard steadily. "We, like yourself, have no masters. You will gain nothing by all this but the knowledge of a faithless servant."

He couldn't, it seemed, stay away from that point.

"The foreign devil may have his own reason for prolonging the talk," suggested Ho Whan in Shensian.

"Why should I?" asked Hazard sharply, shooting a glance at me. "Now, this tablet," he went on; "you will never possess it."

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Why, I wondered, the peculiar inflection on the word "this"? Could it be—— Ah, I had his message.

"Because," continued Hazard slowly, thrusting both hands inside the bosom of his loose Chinese robe, "I have it here. And I have——"

His hands reappeared and in the right one he held the tablet that had been described to us—the tablet of Shun! And in his left.——

"Devil!" Koshinga's great voice snarled hoarsely.

From Ho Whan behind me came a terrible cry.

Hazard had swiftly lifted the pint bottle he held in his left hand to his mouth, pulled the cork with his teeth and, as he spat it out, concluded his sentence.

"Nitric acid, which will destroy it."

As he started to pour the fuming, colorless liquid over the face of the tablet, Ho Whan, forgetting everything in his eagerness to save that tablet and so avert Koshinga's anger, leaped for Hazard, as Hazard had hoped he would.

By the time he came in front of me, I had pulled my revolver out of my gown and, leveling it, I shot him dead.

IV

I TURNED my gun upon Koshinga. I started to pull the trigger but stopped.

It wasn't because he waited the bullet in seeming passivity, watching me closely with his basilisk eyes. The natural instinct against shooting a man who is seemingly both helpless and unafraid would have held me only a moment, long enough to remember the magnitude of the evil I could end with one twitch of my finger.

The instant that realization came, I perceived something else, too, something that explained Koshinga's composure. The moment Ho Whan had leaped for Hazard and died, Koshinga's left hand had lifted sharply. His index finger now rested on the black button which projected from the wall—the button controlling the infernal machine which threatened Hazard's life.

What was it Koshinga had said? "—by pressing on this button—the swift death by the falling weight."

Hazard looked up from his work of obliterating with the whitely fuming acid the already time-worn and almost undecipherable inscriptions on the face of the tablet. He saw me hesitate, saw the reason for it, and he cried out——

"Shoot, Partridge, in Heaven's name!"

"You can not shoot me," said Koshinga calmly.

"Never mind me, Partridge!" cried Hazard in such excitement as I'd never seen him before. "Shoot and then finish this job for me — destroy this Tablet of Shun!"

"You can not shoot me," Koshinga repeated in his icy voice. "You know that your shot will kill your friend, that with the last flicker of my will I would press this button and send the knives and the weight behind the knives down upon him. So, slave of your emotions and of a worn-out creed——"

"He's not a man, but a devil incarnate! Hazard cried. "Shoot him while you've a chance. Do as you'd want me to do if we could change places. Haven't both of us chanced our lives a dozen times——"

I don't remember all Hazard said in his wild urging that I should do what I suppose I should have done. Cold-bloodedly and for the larger good, there's no doubt I should have shot Koshinga and let Hazard die. There was no estimating Koshinga's power for evil in the world—Koshinga with his fiendishly clever brain and his millions of followers. After all, if there were nothing but cold logic in the world, if all the warm and unreasoning passions of humanity were wiped out, how long would humanity itself endure?

Hazard was my friend. I edged toward him, keeping my gun upon Koshinga. With my left hand I reached into a side pocket of my gown for my pocket-knife. It surprized me that Koshinga offered no objection to my movements.

"Poor fool!" he scoffed. "It is your sentimentality that dooms you to mediocrity—you and your class, while I ——"

There was a sort of prescient triumph in his voice now, as if he foresaw not only escape, but the kingdoms of the world at his feet. Fascinated, I stopped and watched him narrowly. He had raised his right hand and it was now on the knob of the wooden door in the wall.

Very slowly, with all the dignity of confident deliberation, he drew the door open, shifted his hold to the inner knob and, still

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keeping his finger on the fatal button, began to back through the opening.

Beyond that door I could see the black beginnings of an earth-walled passage—a passage that led riverward. Wondering a little, I remembered the fifteen steps by which we had come down to this place, remembered that we were far below the surface of the river. How was it Koshinga meant to escape?

"While I—" his voice rang out in a tone of utter conviction—"I will rule the world."

His finger had left the button but was still too close to it for me to chance a shot. His body was already half-shielded behind the door.

Hazard still frantically urged me to fire, and by my own desire to end that embodiment of all evil, I understood his eagerness, surpassing even his instinct to live. I felt however that Koshinga would still find that button even in a last convulsion. Therefore I could not shoot. And then—he was gone.

He had slipped behind the door like a shadow. As the door jammed shut, my bullet sent splinters flying from it.

Flinging Hazard my knife, I sprang for the door, but midway I heard a bar jammed into place on the other side of it. I caught the knob and pulled back on it with all my weight, but the door budged no more than would the wall itself have budged.

Wildly I looked around for a piece of iron, a heavy rock—anything with which to break it down, but I saw only that Hazard was swiftly cutting himself loose. Then I turned to the door again for I heard a sound that bewildered me.

Beyond that door had suddenly begun a mighty rushing of water, a great gurgling and bubbling as of air caught and escaping. A rushing, gurgling and bubbling that died away almost as soon as it had begun—died away and ended with the surging impact of water against the inner side of the door.

It began at the bottom of the door and rose swiftly to the top. Clearly the passageway beyond was filled with water. Clearly Koshinga was drowned. I cried out something to that effect.

"Drowned, you say?" came Hazard's calm voice close behind me. "Drowned, you think?"

"Well, what then?" I demanded, turning upon him sharply.

"This enemy of ours will be hard to handle," said Hazard gravely. "I think he must always plan to hold his finger on the button of power and ever keep a safe escape behind him. We must remember that when we encounter him again."

"But——" I began uncertainly.

"Don't you understand? The surest of escapes. A short passageway with a watertight door at the other end, which, when he opened it, let the river in and let Koshinga out. By now he has come to the surface where, no doubt, a junk is waiting for him. He thought he had us but he took no chances when he brought us here."

"Then we can do nothing," I said despondently.

"Nothing but get away, which shouldn't be difficult. But with Ho Whan dead at our hands and Koshinga well able through his agents to raise the authorities against us, Sian-fu will hardly be healthy for us for some time."

WE MOUNTED the steps, climbed the wall of the ornamental garden to the street and, within an hour, were leaving Sian-fu behind us. So hurried was our departure that it was not until we were trudging behind our donkeys along a narrow road worn deep by the traffic of ages, between fields fertile as in the days of Confucius, that I remembered there was one thing in our adventure that remained unexplained.

"But the tablet?" I cried suddenly. "It was really your possession of the tablet that saved us. How in the name of wonders did you happen to have it?"

"Very simple," replied Hazard. "When I left you this morning I went to see Shen Yun, the fast one. As you remember, we suspected Ho Whan and him of playing much the same game that they did play. I had discovered that Shen Yun was about to be siezed for debt, so I offered him a thousand taels for information concerning the tablet. It turned out that he had it and he gave it to me. He intended to fly to the coast, and I hope for his health's sake he's well on the way."

And I think that also explains," I said slowly, "how you came to have that very convenient bottle of acid."

"Certainly," replied Hazard. "Shen Yun also told me the story of the tablet, and I intended to destroy it as soon as you'd

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seen it. The acid method struck me as the simplest, and I managed to get some at the Mission School where they use it in teaching the process of making anilin dyes. Under the circumstances, it was only natural I'd keep both tablet and bottle hidden inside my gown. It's not so remarkable, considering the unintelligent membership of the Ko Lao Hui and their one rule of implicit obedience, that those who drugged me and carried me to Koshinga discovered neither. Koshinga had given them no orders to search me, and they didn't."

"Well," I reflected, "though we're in flight, we're hardly losers. If Koshinga escaped us, so did we escape him and he lost in Ho Whan a valuable agent. Then there's the tablet——"

"The tablet of Shun," said Hazard meditatively. "In whatever hands it happened to fall it was an anchor cast too far into the past. That's why I was going to destroy it—it isn't good for men to be governed by their ancestors. Yes, it's well for New China that the tablet of Shun is gone."

That Everlasting Woman

by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "Godfather to Satan's Kitchen," "The Lavender Letter," etc.

WHEN mountaineer Matt McEllery died a natural death at the hands of a Tennessee sheriff who could shoot almost as well as McEllery and a fraction of a second quicker, it really was a natural death, considering the life he had lived. He left behind him a son of twelve with neither kith, kin nor friends, which is an unfortunate state of affairs for one of such tender years, as any fair-minded person must admit. But the boy did not worry himself about it, certainly; there was too much of his father's hard, fatalistic philosophy in him for that; what was to be, had to be, so why weep over it?

Besides being a blue-white terror as a fighter and a gunman, Matt Mc Ellery was a sort of gypsy, and a sworn enemy of the demon care. His son was much like him. The father had dragged the lad over the mountains of eastern Kentucky and western North Carolina, northern Georgia and eastern Tennessee, all within less than five years, and the lad had never grown weary of it.

The elder McEllery professed to hate all women, and there is small room to doubt that he did hate all women; also, he had painstakingly taught his son to hate them. There was a story to the effect that his wife had left him rather than go a-gypsying with him, and that he had to steal the boy from her. This story may well be true.

Little McEllery, however, had one trait that his iron-souled sire did not give him. This was a vein of genuine goodness that lay buried under his other and less worthy traits. It was like gold hidden beneath layers and layers of flinty formations, and the person who started it moving toward the surface was a big, native-born mountaineer timberjack called "Fo'gitful Tom" Ogletree, of the logging outfit on Mad Kate's River.

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The lawless deceased had never addressed his strong-willed offspring by any name other than the nickname, "Bantam," and he had taught Bantam that to win a good, hard, man-to-man battle was the highest of all earthly attainments. When he went out on the long dim trail, Bantam took to the logging-camps like a young duck to water, working his way when it was necessary, talking his way when it was possible.

The drifting habit stuck with him, and he left odd, shining pieces of his mind with at least a dozen logging superintendents within the next fifteen months. His one ambition was to grow into the greatest of all living timberjack fighters, and he was beginning in a faultless fashion.

It was when in the erratic course of his wanderings he arrived at the camp on Mad Kate's River—this dashing, tumbling stream was no larger than the average lowland creek—that he picked up his first friend. Fo'gitful Tom Ogletree, it was. Bantam McEllery soon became the bully of the outfit, if one may say that it had one. Tom Ogletree, a fighter of more than local renown, stood back of the boy in all the small tyrannies he proposed. Little McEllery was nearer to being settled there at the Mad Kate's River camp than he had ever been before.

There came a lazy Sunday morning in June, and all the loggers save the peculiarly absent-minded Tom Ogletree were at their customary rough play in the clearing. Ogletree sat brooding in silence on his narrow bunk in the sleeping-quarters of the crew in the up-stairs of the big and unpainted boarding-house. Bantam McEllery, his youthful brow furrowed and his eyes narrowed and sober, pussy-footed up the stairway and across the rough floor, halting squarely before his pal. Ogletree was staring moodily at the toes of his boots now. He seemed unaware of the lad's presence. and it nettled the high-tempered McEllery somewhat.

"Fo'gitful!" exploded Bantam.

Still the logger stared silently.

"Ay, Fo'gitful!" Bantam cried provokedly.

"Yeuh?"

Ogletree looked toward the barefooted, bareheaded and freckled, jeans-clad boy. Ogletree's gaze was dreary, troubled; his face in itself, though it was fine and strong, was tragedy. The boy's heart sank. He swallowed, so to speak, the very pointed question he had meant to put, and stammered out instead:

"I—I'm lonesome, Fo'gitful. Tell me a tale."

He sat down on the bunk just behind him, which was his own by right of conquest, and wiggled his scarred and sunburned toes idly.

"I've fo'got," Fo'gitful muttered, "most o' the tales I knowed. But I heerd Superintendent Blaney tell one today, and I'll pass it along to you. Wunst the' was a man who had a naggin' wife——"

"Cut it!" interrupted Matt McEllery's incorrigible boy. "It's about wimmen, and I don't want to hear it."

"It's all I know right now, Bant."

Bantam considered in a ludicrously grown-up fashion.

"Well," he said finally, "let 'er rip, Fo'gitful. Mebbe it's better'n nothin'."

Fo'gitful Tom proceeded very slowly, without even the suggestion of a smile anywhere in his story:

"Wunst the' was a man who had a naggin' wife, and her mother lived with 'em, and his wife, she died. Yeuh, cashed in, kicked the bucket. Rheumatiz', mebbe, son. When the fun'ral percession was all made up and ready to start, this man's best friend took him to a carriage that had jest one empty seat which was by the side o' his mother-in-law. 'Jump in quick,' says the best friend; 'everything's a-waitin' on you to start fo' the cimetery.'

"But," Fo'gitful Tom continued, "the man drawed back. It was too much fo' him to ride wi' his mother-in-law. 'Hurry up!' says the best friend. 'Ye're a-delayin' everything!'

"'Oh, all right,' says the man, nigh sobbin'. "'I'll ride wi' her, but I can tell ye right here and now, it shore spoils the day fo' me'!'"

Young McEllery sneered.

"Is that all?"

"Yeuh; ain't it better'n nothin'?"

"It shore ain't!" exclaimed Bantam. "Tell me a bear tale or somethin' funny. What's the very funniest thing ye ever seed, Fo'gitful?"

"I fo'git," and Ogletree only grinned, "lessen it was a idjit man a ridin' a saddled cow wi' a plug hat on."

"The cow had the plug hat on?"

"No, the idjit man did."

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"Oh," Bantam uttered disappointedly. Then his brow became furrowed again, and again he wiggled his bare brown toes. The very momentous question he meant to ask his big pal had surged upward once more in his mind. He pinched his freckled nose, tugged at one ear, ran his fingers through his tow-colored hair and fidgeted otherwise for two long and silent minutes before he blurted anxiously—

"Are ye in love wi' Sally Maden, Fo'gitful?"

OGLETREE too had professed to despise the female of his species. It was this common bond that had held them together strongest, he and Matt McEllery's boy.

Sally Maden was twenty-two, as pretty as a laurel blossom and as winsome as a woodland nymph. She lived with her ailing father in a big old log cabin a mile or more down the river, and the two of them were as poor as they were proud, and they were as proud as a pair of golden peacocks. To let the cat out of the bag without stint or favor, there was but one unmarried male person in the Mad Kate's logging outfit who had not asked her, at one time or an other, to marry him, and that one was the almost-fourteen-years-old Bantam McEllery.

Fo'gitful Tom did not answer the boy's blunt inquiry. Bantam stared hard at him and put the question again but in different wording.

"Are ye in love wi' that everlastin' woman, Fo'gitful?"

It came in tones of exceedingly bitter reproof. The closer adjective meant more, when little McEllery used it, than a mere damn; it was a long word, and it sounded large in his mouth.

" 'Everlastin' woman'? " muttered Ogletree, with queer inflections. "That don't sound good to me, Mister McEllery."

"I said it. 'Everlastin' woman.' "

Mr. McEllery bent forward eagerly. He was, doubtless, still hoping that his grave fears were groundless.

"I got to know, Fo'gitful. Are ye?"

"Who said I was?" asked Tom Ogletree.

The boy, bright-eyed, fiery-cheeked, came out with the whole of it. The words fairly tumbled over themselves:

" 'Mink' Shorter, he said it was afore my time here; he said ye was plum bug-house about Sally Maden, and she throwed ye down. He said ye hadn't been the same man sence, a-mopin' around like a sick dawg. He said ye'd grieved over it so much that ye was awful absent-minded, which was why they all called ye Fo'gitful Tom. I want to know right now; is it so, or is it not so, Tom Ogletree?"

"Ca'm yeself, Banty," smiled Ogletree.

His voice was as gentle as a half-born spring breeze, but his face was white. "Ca'm yeself, little Mister McEllery. The' ain't no use o' goin' off in the air thataway, son. As fo' 'Mink-Eye' Shorter——"

"He said," Bantam cut in, "that ye was a-helpin' the smith here at the camp one day and that ye fo'got where ye'd put the hammer. And he said that ye hunted a hour fo' it, and when ye found it ye'd done fo'got what ye wanted with it! Is all o' this so, or is it not so?"

"S'posen it is, Banty; what then?"

Ogletree's eyes were filled with a peculiar light, in which there was a sizable hint of defiance.

"S'posen it is!" the boy echoed shrilly. "I wouldn't be yore pal no more, that's what! I'm flesh and blood o' Matt McEllery and a Dimacrat, and a fighter to the bone, and I shore wouldn't never be a pal to a softy—a—a candy man!"

He spoke as if of course it would be a sheer fatality for him to withdraw his friendship. Fo'gitful Tom continued to eye the lad peculiarly for a silent minute; then he rose, a stalwart young giant who did not know his own strength, and strode across the creaking floor, down the steps, across the long porch, and into the grassy clearing. Bantam McEllery followed him expectantly.

When Ogletree reached the group of timberjacks that had strung itself around a boxing-bout in the center of the open space in the woodland, there was fire in his gaze. Superintendent Blaney noticed it, and guessed something of what hung over his camp. He had seen that same fire in Tom Ogletree's gaze before, and more than once.

"Look here, Fo'gitful," he began, with a hand on the irate logger's arm, "ye don't want to start anything——"

Ogletree threw the hand of his boss aside with a quick angry fling.

"I'm a-goin' to spank Mink-Eye Shorter," he broke in, "or else I'm a-goin' to spank

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both you and Mink-Eye Shorter too. Better le' me alone, super, hadn't ye?"

Super Blaney shrugged his shoulders and smiled his resignation. He had done all that anybody could reasonably expect him to do toward preserving peace in his camp on that quiet Sunday morning. He knew very well that Fo'gitful Tom could spank him or any other man in the outfit, if he so desired.

Blaney folded his arms and watched Ogletree as he walked straight toward the slim and dark, beady-eyed degenerate whom the Mad Kate's River crew knew as Mink-Eye who now sat smirking alcoholic smirks to himself on a log at the edge of the clearing.

Mink-Eye had drunk of new roasting-ear and buckeye whisky not wisely and far too much, that morning, else he would not have been so unpardonably foolish as to link the names of Sally Maden and Tom Ogletree together in his foul, foul mouth in such a careless manner. He saw two gaunt hillmen coming when there should have been but one, and he rose unsteadily, seeming half-inclined to seek safety from the wrath to come in the labyrinthine laurels behind him.

Ogletree caught him from the earth as if he were no heavier than a paper doll, sat down on the convenient log, bent him face-downward across his knees and made the woodland ring with blows of a kind made more or less famous by old-fashioned fathers. The boy McEllery looked on delightedly. His iron-souled sire and Mink-Eye's trashy, mouthy people had always been enemies—once Matt McEllery had whipped a field full of Shorters.

The onlooking timberjacks yelled their full appreciation of the ludicrous spectacle. Fo'gitful Tom, panting a little, put the beady-eyed man on his feet.

"Now," said Ogletree, "run along and talk about me some more, and the next time I'll use a board wi' nails in it."

Shorter looked frightened, and the loggers yelled again. Then Shorter singled out Bantam McEllery and glared at him with the old hatred; it was a glare that threatened vengeance in the immediate future, big Tom Ogletree notwithstanding. The McEllery, however, was not afraid. For that matter, he was never afraid of anything. Fear had been left entirely out of his make-up.

"Yah-yah-yah!" he taunted. "Got a spankin', didn't ye, old Minky-Eye? Got a spankin'—yah-yah-yah!"

Shorter slunk away and was soon lost to sight in the sea of undergrowth that shut in the camp. Ogletree turned toward the boarding-house and found himself facing Superintendent Blaney. He smiled at Blaney.

"Sorry I said what I did, super."

"'S all right," Blaney replied. "Take this from me, Fo'gitful. Better keep a look out fo' Mink-Eye; he's done got a man or two from the scrub and he's more or less crazy—over whisky and Sally Maden."

Ogletree's smile faded to nothing at the mention of the girl's name.

"Don't you never," he whispered, half-desperately, "say Sally Maden to me any more."

AT that, Bantam McEllery, who was standing near the two men, came to a fresh realization of the fact that Fo'gitful Tom had not answered his question, had not denied one word of the terrible accusation. Little McEllery suddenly cried in both defiance and a sort of buck-wild abandon:

"Sally Maden! Sally Maden! Sally Maden!"

Fo'gitful Tom wheeled, white-faced, upon the lad. His eyes met those of the lad squarely, and neither flinched.

"About one more hint o' that, little Mister McEllery," the big mountaineer drawled in a hard voice, "and I'm done wi' you. I hope ye onderstand me, little Mister McEllery."

"Sally Maden! Sally Maden!" clipped Bantam. He turned himself half-way around. "Why don't ye spank me? Y'ain't got the narve! Sally Maden! Ye're big enough—Sally Maden! Softy! Candy man! Yah-yah-yah! Ribbons on ye onderclo'es! Lace on ye hat! Part ye hair in the middle! High heels on ye boots! Oh, kid-glove sport! Sally Maden! Sally—Sally '*patica!*'"

He stopped because he was out of breath, and a dead silence followed his words. On his sunburned countenance there was, not the light of worship turned to hate, perhaps, but something in a manner akin to it. Fo'gitful Tom said nothing. Silence was indeed golden then, and he knew it. He walked slowly toward the boarding-house.

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The timberjacks resumed their horseplay in the clearing. Bantam McEllery moped to the near-by commissary's back door, sat down on the sill and gave himself up wholly to hard thinking. It was intelligent thinking, too, for one of his years; he had to struggle, always, for his own survival in the scheme of things and it had sharpened his wits. His reasoning ran on the order of this:

There was a great deal of truth in the story Mink-Eye Shorter had told him, of course, because Fo'gitful Tom had not denied it. Fo'gitful Tom was a sure-enough "softy," a "candy man;" he had lost his head completely over an everlasting woman. But he was worth the pains of redemption, Bantam finally concluded. And, he believed, there was yet time in which to do it.

The particular line of salvation that seemed to promise most was not the line he would have chosen, had not the devil driven; he would not have selected it, had such dire necessity known a law. He rose, slipped unnoticed into the sea of laurels and stole rapidly down a dim path that followed the wild and tumbling little river, heading toward old Isaac Maden's cabin.

He knew Sally when he saw her; he had seen her before. She was standing at the split-paling gate, toying idly with the bow of faded blue ribbon that held together the end of her long, thick plait of brown hair. She was barefooted and bareheaded, and her dress was of calico and badly worn.

He walked straight up to her. She turned her head slightly, saw him and recognized in him the boy pal of her erstwhile idolized sweetheart. Stories of the McEllery's striking devotion to Tom had come to her ears often.

"H'lo, Bantam," she greeted, smiling her wood-nymph smile.

"H'lo yeself," said Bantam, his voice stern and businesslike rather than insolent. He spoke as if to a man. "I got," he went on, his eyes narrowing, "a cur'osity to know somepin' about you, Sally. Do ye cuss and drink licker and play cyards on Sunday fo' money, or not?"

"I do *not!*" cried Sally.

She laughed almost merrily, for she was not without the sense of humor that is the leavening of life in most hill-folk. But she saw that her visitor seemed in deadly earnest, and she too became very sober.

"Who told ye I did, Bantam?" she demanded.

Little Mr. McEllery bristled. He ignored her question.

"Didn't ye tell Fo'gitful Tom Ogletree that he was a —— fool?"

"Why, no! Oh, no, no, no!" Sally Maden blushed and went pale immediately afterward. "Did—did Tom Ogletree say I did?"

She caught him by the shoulders and shook him, and her topaz eyes had become misty; her mouth quivered.

"Did Tom Ogletree say I d-d-did?"

"Turn me loose," snarled the McEllery, and he broke away. "I ain't a-tellin' things about my pal to no woman."

He started for the camp, leaving Sally standing weakly against a gate-post. That which he thought of as a perfectly pardonable piece of trickery, considering the circumstances, had gone through without the least hitch, and he hadn't even had to lie outright!

"So long!" he flung over his head at her. "Goo'by, Sally '*patica!*'"

"Oh, my!" moaned Sally Maden, half-choking. "What a boy! And I'd been a-thinkin' I could love him!"

Bantam McEllery didn't hear that, and if he had heard it, it wouldn't have made any real difference. He went whistling down through the woodland, as one who is both victorious and happy. Well, hadn't he widened the gulf, made it virtually unbridgable, the gulf that yawned between Sally Maden and his god, and thereby paved the way for his god's ultimate redemption? He thought he had, anyway, and he wasn't so very much in error in his judgment.

When he had covered a fourth of the way to the camp, he began to feel a little mean, a little as if he had stolen something. But he soon bucked up, told himself aloud that he was Matt McEllery's boy, a Democrat and a fighter to the bone. He managed to laugh aloud at his scruples. A few minutes later he saw, with those keen eyes of his, that he was about to meet somebody in the dim woods path, and he instinctively darted into the near-by laurels.

IT was a big man in laced boots, clay-colored corduroys, blue-flannel shirt and broad-rimmed gray hat, the rigging so much worn in the timber camps of the Southern mountains. His

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hat-rim was drawn low in front, and he was intent upon watching his feet, apparently, as they led him down the river trail. Bantam peered out, saw that it was Fo'gitful Tom and turned up his freckled nose disdainfully. Tom too, had found it expedient to pay Sally Maden a visit on that fine Sunday morning, and little McEllery guessed it at once.

When Fo'gitful had gone on, Bantam followed him as stealthily as any wildcat could have done; his bare feet slipped along through the dead brown leaves of other years with no noise at all. The unsuspecting Ogletree halted only when he had reached a point within two yards of the gate of the Madens, and his youthful shadower stole into the shelter of a clump of blooming sheep-laurel not half a dozen rods behind him, and watched, listening eagerly. Sally was still standing there. She was still leaning weakly against a gate-post.

Tom took off his hat rather awkwardly and rather awkwardly ran the fingers of one hand through his hair. He faced the girl squarely, and she straightened somewhat. Bantam McEllery saw, forgot absolutely that he was acting an unworthy part and grinned a grin that he meant to be crammed with darkest villany.

"Sally," Fo'gitful began; and he spoke with evident difficulty, "ef I was wrong, I'm awful sorry and I shore hope ye can fo'give me. Ef it was you that was wrong, it's puffectly all right wi' me. Sally, honey, I want ye most pow'ful, awful bad."

Here let it be recorded, parenthetically as it were, that both of them had been in the wrong, or neither of them had been in the wrong, as one chooses to view the matter. It had been nothing more or less than a simple lovers' quarrel, which, like most other lovers' quarrels, had been born of the idolatrous light in which each held the other.

Having bent the knee of penitence, which involved the swallowing whole of a vast amount of the most stubborn of hill pride, Tom Ogletree waited breathlessly for the girl's reply. It was disappointing when it came, and it was exceedingly perplexing, not to say amazing. The boy had done his work well, indeed.

"Ye shorely are mistaken, Tom," she told him in tones of gall-flavored and desperate triumph. "Ye don't want me at all, I'm shore, 'cause I cuss and I—I drink licker and I play cyards on Sunday fo' money, Tom. Tom," she sizzled, "ye're a—ye're a —— fool!"

It was hard for Ogletree to believe that he had really heard her say it. He stared open-mouthed at her. She stared at him. Behind his screening clump of sheep-laurel, the small eavesdropper gloated over his signal victory. The dust that had been Matt McEllery must have smiled. Then Sally drew herself up a little higher, tilted her chin a little more and threw her fine shoulders back, while two tears tumbled from her wide brown eyes to the corners of her quivering mouth.

"I'm o' pore folks, Tom," she went on, her voice now unsteady and piteous. "Ye see, I haf to go barefooted and I ain't got but one other dress asides this'n I've got on; ye've allus found me in patched-up calico; but I've kep' my soul in silk and lavender, Tom——"

The everlasting woman could get no further with it. She caught her breath jerkily twice, turned from Ogletree and fumbled blindly for the gate's latch while Ogletree stood there somehow afraid, and the boy in the laurels suffered, and promptly warded off, another attack of his enemy, conscience. When she had slammed the gate shut between her and the big timberjack, this tore itself from her throat:

"It seemed like I'd haf to marry or starve to death. I think I—I'd ruther starve to death. I hope I don't never see ye any more, Tom Ogletree, 'cause I—— Oh, I wisht I was d-d-d-dead!"

She ran into the house.

Bantam McEllery shrank closer to the ground when Fo'gitful Tom passed him. He felt meaner than ever now, and even his telling himself over and over that he was Matt McEllery's boy, a Democrat and a fighter to the bone, did not quite furnish the stimulating prop the worst three-fourths of him so sorely needed. After some ten minutes of wrestling with the matter and ultimately losing to the worst three-fourths, he crept to the trail, dug a tiny thorn from his foot with a master pin that he carried in the waistband of his jeans for just such purposes, and went moodily in the direction of the Mad Kate's River logging-camp.

When he reached the clearing more than two hours later, he saw his former big pal sitting alone, on one end of the long boarding-house porch, wrapped up in a very

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tight study of his boot-laces. Brave as he was, Bantam felt that he couldn't undergo the ordeal of a face-to-face meeting with Fo'gitful Tom just then.

He had missed the camp's noonday meal, and he was as hungry as a bear in April. He went stealthily around to the commissary's front door, which was open.

The clerk, a slim young fellow whom the loggers knew as "Nancy," stood behind the rough-board counter and figured on the top of a glass showcase that was filled with red suspenders, blue bandannas, cheap cigars and striped candy. Nobody else was in the store at that moment. Nancy looked up as the boy entered. Nancy was a graduate of a lowland high school, and he was very proud of it; also, he had a funny-bone that ran, sometimes, pretty well into rank foolery.

"Bant," said he, winking inwardly, "what would be the result if an irresistible force struck an immovable object? You're real smart; maybe you can tell me."

"I shore can," snapped Bantam. He had always regarded the clerk as a barrier in the path of his life. "I want a dime's wo'th o' cream'ry and ten cents' wo'th o' chips, Nance, and I wants 'em right now, 'cause my stummick thinks my head's cut off!"

The erudite Nancy hacked off a wedge of cheese and thrust it, with a dozen or so of crackers of the hardtack variety, into a paper bag and shoved it all into the hands of little McEllery.

"All right; what would be the result, Bant?"

"The'd be a thunderin' big bust-up," said Bantam, wrapping an arm about his purchases. "Say, Nance, have ye ever found out why Mink Shorter wears blood-red undershirts in the Winter-time?"

"No; why?" Nancy bit like a hungry trout.

"To keep him warm," clipped Bantam wickedly. "Yah-yah-yah! Yah! I'm real smart, Nance. Charge the chips and cream'ry to profit and loss, as Super Blaney says!"

"Twenty cents, Bant; twenty cents!" bawled the callow clerk.

But Bantam was gone. Nancy rushed to the door barely in time to see the boy diving into the undergrowth at the edge of the clearing; then he raced to where Fo'gitful Tom sat alone, still studying his boot-laces very closely, on the boarding-house porch. Nancy was of the breed that drops a nickel into the church's contribution-plate and takes four pennies out.

Ogletree rose slowly. He felt that he was responsible, after a fashion, for the doings of wild Matt McEllery's offspring, and this unforgivable bit of thievery....

"Which way did he go, Nance?" asked Fo'gitful Tom.

BANTAM ran north, east, north again, then west twice as far as he had gone east, covering the most of a mile in all of it. He brought up panting at a high log-and-slab ox-wagon bridge across Mad Kate's River, looked sharply about him, and smiled a congratulatory smile directed toward himself. The lad walked to the middle of the bridge, sat down with his bare feet hanging over a nest of half-submerged and jagged rocks in the stream below, and went into the paper bag for his belated midday meal.

He had finished the greater part of it when Mink-Eye Shorter came staggering over the bridge and halted beside him. Shorter was drunker than ever, and his beady eyes were dangerously bright with hatred and an insane craving for vengeance —Bantam had put on the last straw when he had caused the villain's humiliation in the presence of the entire Mad Kate's River crew and taunted him in the bargain.

The McEllery looked around and upward belligerently, crushed half a cracker in his hand and pushed it into his mouth.

"Ye ain't a-goin' to git a bite," he said, not very distinctly because of the fulness of his eating and speaking instrument. "Ye might as well be a movin' on, Mink. I'd split up wi' any dawg, but I shore ain't a-goin' to split up wi' you."

Shorter glared. His thin nostrils dilated. His jaws were set so tightly that their muscles stood out in hard ridges under the yellowish-brown skin of his cheeks. The old, old hate for the people of whom this lad was the last living sprout held high carnival with his drunken emotions; made him, verily, a maniac. Had not Bantam been a McEllery, he would have been somewhat afraid, but he was a McEllery.

"Did ye git me, Mink?" he demanded.

Shorter's lips suddenly thrust themselves out straight, stiff, like those of a

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beast, showing bared and clenched teeth that were more like fangs than teeth; a hissing noise came from his throat. He jerked back a leg and kicked savagely at the boy, but Bantam swung himself out of the way and went to his feet with the quickness of a young panther, though he dropped the paper bag and its contents to the stones below in so doing.

"Ye rat!" foamed Mink-Eye. "Ye loggin'-camp rat!"

He caught little McEllery by a shoulder. Little McEllery struggled to free himself and failed; try as he would, he could not rid himself of the madman's frenzied grip. Then Bantam struck with a bare, hard fist, and Mink-Eye swore terribly as the blow landed at an upward angle on the point of his nose. Again Bantam drew back to strike, when the demoniacal Shorter caught him up in both hands, straightened with him and prepared to throw him to the stones fifty feet below.

"I'll settle wi' Matt McEllery fo' good," he growled. "I'll settle wi' him!"

"Tom!" shrieked Bantam. It came loud and clear, not frightenedly, but desperately, a Macedonian cry. "Ay, Tom! Fo'gitful! Ay, Tom!"

"I'll settle wi' Matt McEllery fo' good," repeated Shorter, satanical triumph in his rasping voice as he deliberately began to measure with his eye the distance from his footing to the nest of jagged stones in the river. "I'll——"

The warning shout of an onrushing giant of a man interrupted him, and simultaneously the booted feet of the giant struck the bridge in long strides. Ogletree and Nancy had gone directly up the river in their search for the miscreant lad and they had arrived within a single tiny second of being too late. Nancy promptly sought cover behind a kindly, convenient tree.

Shorter flung the little body, but it did not clear the bridge floor, due to the villain's inadvertent staggering step backward. Bantam fell on the edge and clung there dazedly, with a trickle of blood at his temple; he was too perilously near to utter insensibility to drag himself to safety. Shorter went to a rear trousers pocket and came back with his hand filled with hardened black rubber and nickel-plated cast iron; it was a stubby revolver of the suicidal, bulldog type. He leveled the weapon at the oncoming Ogletree and ordered him to halt, but the boy was still writhing weakly on the very brink of a sheer drop to his death, and Ogletree saw it and refused to halt.

"I'll shoot!" yelled the drink-crazed man, and he did shoot.

His aim was good, indeed. A slug of lead struck Fo'gitful Tom squarely over his heart, and the impact staggered him. Vaguely he wondered why he didn't fall, and yet he knew he didn't dare to fall. Shorter fired again and missed clear; again he fired, and a bullet buried itself in Ogletree's right shoulder, but the giant timberjack went on.

"Stop!" bellowed Mink-Eye, foamy-jawed. "I'll kill ye, Fo'gitful——"

"I won't die!" snapped Fo'gitful.

Another spurt of flame, another loud but shallow roar, and another bullet sang toward Tom Ogletree; it struck him high in the left shoulder, just under the collarbone. The boy seemed closer than ever to falling over the edge, and Ogletree didn't stop even now—he wouldn't die! Once more the bulldog blazed, and a bullet tore through the fleshy part of Fo'gitful Tom's upper left arm, but still Fo'gitful Tom went on.

A final desperate stride, and his right hand, clenched as hard as a knot of wire cable, with all his strength and near the last of his strength behind it, caught Shorter at the point of the chin, lifted him clear and sent him dashing head-first to the jagged stones fifty feet below.

Then Ogletree grasped the now almost wholly unconscious boy by an arm and dragged him to safety.

"Pore—little—Mister—McEllery," he murmured brokenly, in sympathy.

Now he could die. It was, truly, the greater love. A sea of black oblivion overwhelmed him.

The erudite Nancy came from behind his kindly, sheltering tree and walked fearsomely to the middle of the high log-and-slab bridge. He had been pale; he now went white, a dirty white, at the sight of the big man lying inert and all bloody beside the quiet figure of the boy. So far as he was able to see, they were both dead. He ran toward the camp, shouting the superintendent's name as he went, and ten minutes later Blaney and half a dozen loggers reached the scene of the fight.

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BANTAM McELLERY came to as they were about to pick him up, and they set him on his feet. Blaney had Fo'gitful Tom carried to the camp and placed in his own, Blaney's, bed in the down-stairs part of the boarding-house; then he sent a logging-locomotive sputtering toward the lowland for a doctor and gave the wounded and insensible man such simple first aids as he had.

While the night drew on and progressed, Bantam McEllery sat huddled in a corner of the room in which lay the fighting man who had been his god, who had so nearly lost his life to save him, Bantam McEllery. He had heard Nancy's more or less graphic description of it. A Vandyked doctor came two hours after darkness had fallen, and found Ogletree still unconscious. Little McEllery climbed to his knees at the low foot of the bed, and watched, his eyes wide and dry, his pulse racing, his breathing tense and quick. Amid a deathly silence the doctor took out the bullets, dressed the wounds and applied restoratives while Blaney held a light for him.

After a period of time that was as a century to Bantam, Tom Ogletree looked upward in an uncertain fashion and tried to sit up. The doctor gently pressed him back to the pillow.

"Not yet, not yet," said the Vandyked doctor. "You ought to get along because of that wonderful constitution of yours, but you'll have to lie quiet for the present. That lower bullet there," he said to Blaney, "would have got him, sure, it if hadn't spattered and dodged along a rib. Did you find the other fellow? Did you arrest him?"

"The Old Master arrested him," growled Blaney. "He's a-layin' dead on the rocks in Mad Kate's River, neck broke and head a-facin' the other way. Look there, doc!"

Ogletree was again trying to sit up. His eyes were delirious and bright.

"Do ye hurt much, Tom?" Blaney muttered.

"Sally," said the delirious logger. "Sally! Sally Maden! She cusses! She drinks licker! She plays cyards on Sunday fo' money. She said I was a —— fool——"

He sank back and closed his eyes. It was then that Bantam McEllery, son of Matt McEllery, Democrat and fighter to the bone, dropped in a small heap at the foot of the bed and wept out his heart for the very first time in his life.

WHEN a passer-by told Sally Maden of the fight on the bridge, she sat down on the cabin's front door-step to wait for—she didn't quite know what, at first. If only Tom hadn't said those terrible things about her! If he lived and wanted her, he would send for her. If he died—nothing mattered.

Darkness fell and no word came, and still Salley Maden sat on the door-step. Hours went on and she didn't move. Night-hawks shrieked; owls cried out mournfully and weirdly from the heart of the dark wilderness; but Sally heard nothing of it. Toward midnight she became aware that she was cold; she stole into the cabin, found a shawl for her shoulders, went back to the door-step and sat there again, wrapping her calico skirt around her bare feet. If Tom lived and wanted her, he would send for her. She would be ready.

When the dawning of another day was half over, her staring, patient eyes told her that the slight figure of a barefoot boy had suddenly taken the place of the gate. She sat very still, though her heart ran wild as the lad crept up to her as one who bears the burden of a heavy sin.

"How is he, Bantam?" the girl asked smotheredly, her nerves on edge and tight, ready to snap in twain.

"Better. The doc says he'll make it. The doc says it'd take more'n a bulldawg pistol to do Fo'gitful Tom," said the wee, shamed voice of Bantam McEllery.

Then, feeling like a Judas who had neither pieces of silver to bury nor noose with which to hang himself, he went to his knees at the feet of the everlasting woman and confessed his sin wholly; and the everlasting woman put her arms around him and drew his tousled head to the warmth of her breast, forgiving everything, before she rose to hasten to Tom.

"Ye'll go back wi' me, honey," she said sweetly. "Ye'll be our own boy, won't ye?"

The McEllery, Democrat and fighter, did not answer. He walked slowly and alone down to the open gate, where he picked up a small and slender clothes-bag he had brought. Then he silently turned away forever, going down Mad Kate's River without once looking back. The dust that had been Matt McEllery must have smiled.

They might, he told himself, draw their own conclusions. And so, indeed, may the rest of us.

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THE GATE THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN

A Four-Part Story
Part 1

By HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "When Kentucky Starved," "Gentlemen of the North," etc.

CHAPTER I

HOLD-UPS

SEVEN thousand feet above sea-level and within two miles of the top of the ridge which almost choked Raton Pass, stood the stout adobe house of Richens Lacy Wooton. In the pioneer annals of the West, Wooton was proclaimed to be second only to "Kit" Carson as a mountain man. Had one accosted him by his given name, Wooton probably would have hesitated before replying, but when called "Uncle Dick," his genial smile was immediate. Wherever border men penetrated, Uncle Dick Wooton was a name to swear by and a symbol of stanchness of spirit. Richens Lacy was too much of a mouthful for the hard-headed mountain men. "Dick" came pleasantly, compact and agreeable. The preface of "Uncle" came naturally after the mountaineer had accumulated years of experiences and was accepted as an oracle on all that pertained to the plains, the Indians and the Rockies.

A prominent trait in Uncle Dick was his loyalty to the past, his ability to find rugged virtues in, and an inclination to gloss over, the evils of the dead years. This characteristic was exemplified in his high-perched adobe house, built after the style of an old-time Southern plantation residence and a constant reminder to the owner that he was Virginia born.

The house stood on the toll-road Uncle Dick had built through the pass when the migration of settlers, gold-seekers and adventurers demanded a more direct route for wagons to southeast Colorado and northeast New Mexico than was afforded by the old Santa Fé Trail. The construction of this road revealed two striking qualities in the builder: a stubborn courage that persevered to the end, and a thrifty shrewdness that would not allow the glamour of romantic yesterdays to blurr his vision in providing for the morrow. From his lofty home the mountain man could look down on the valley of El Rio de las Animas Perditas—The River of Lost Souls—a name which was later shortened to Le Purgatoire by French trappers invading the country in defiance to Spain, and known as the Picketwire by American bull-whackers who demanded a practical nomenclature. To the north rose the Spanish Peaks with their virginal snows. Spanish sentiment early christened them Las Dos Hermanas—The Two Sisters. The Ute Indians approximated this with their Wahtoya — The Twins. But with a directness that ignored any suggestion of the fanciful or frilled, the first Americans styled them the Spanish Peaks and died gallantly at their feet to prove their right to occupy that country. What stories these Peaks could tell of massacre and heroism!

Far in the north, hung high in the abysmal blue of the Summer sky, was the white

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dome of Pike's Peak. On all sides, practically, the vision was blocked by horizons of serrated tops, all standing watch over man's puny miracle now working itself out along the Arkansas River Road from Leavenworth to Santa Fé.

Surrounded by these ancient landmarks Uncle Dick had played his part in the contest between red and white, commencing when, as a youth, he had joined a wagon-train belonging to the Bents and Colonel St. Vrain. Now he had withdrawn high above the old battle-fields to watch daily the passing of the old and the coming of the new. The old order was dying hard and with many a tragic protest, during this Summer of 1867.

Somewhere up the old trail was the punitive expedition of General S. Hancock, or Old-Man-of-the-Thunder, as the Kiowas called him because of the Thunder-Birds he wore on his shoulders. Dohasan, greatest of all Kiowa chiefs, had been dead a year. The Little Arkansas Treaty, signed by Apache, Comanche and Kiowa two years back, where Wichita now stands, was largely in the discard. The sacking of Julesburg by Sioux and Cheyennes within rifle-shot of Fort Sedgwick also had happened two years before.

Conditional causes, however, stretch back indefinitely, like one's ancestors, and to follow them is to hunt for the oldest yesterday. Broadly put, the buffalo long since had weaned the plains tribes from agricultural pursuits, while the coming of the horse had extended the warrior's roamings and multiplied tribal wars. The trader had poured his rum upon the fires; Santa Fé traders had brought smallpox to take its awful toll; the discovery of gold at Pike's Peak in 1858, in Idaho in 1861 and later in Montana, had hurled a terrific amount of adventurous travel on to the plains.

California gold-hunters had had three choices of routes: around the Horn, across the Isthmus, or across the plains; but the discovery that made Colorado the most densely populated section in the Indian country left no breadth of choice, and in 1859 a hundred and fifty thousand gold-seekers and traders swarmed up the Platte, the Arkansas and the Smoky Hill rivers.

Less than a third of these remained, while the hundred thousand odd trooped back across the plains, frightening game and enraging the Indians.

Now approached the hour for the final curtain on the ruthless and the lawless. Once the toll-road was completed, the Overland Stage Company promptly used it as a station, and through the gate in the mountains passed the lumbering vehicles, freight-wagons and soldiers, Mexicans and Indians.

For thirty years Uncle Dick's shrewd eyes had observed the changes taking place on the plains and in the mountains. Old-timers were still left to tell of their coups against the red men and their defiance of the elements, but these old times were about to vanish forever, marking the exit of that wonderful genus, the mountain man.

With wonderful perspicacity Uncle Dick had watched the plains tribes exchange an empire for reservations. Less than a decade before this Summer day in 1867, it had been possible to palm off a new spread-eagle cent on the unsophisticated savages for a two-and-a-half-dollar gold-piece. Now the Indians, in looting a stage, were knowing enough to save even the paper money. With this education came a full awakening to their peril. Old-Man-of-the-Thunder needs must keep his eyes open. One called Custer was gallantly riding toward a tragic death nine years away.

The actors in this terrific drama of remaking a land were not limited to gold-hunters, traders and the Indians. Grim romance, with its ghastly retribution, was afforded by the exploits of that pest, the road-agent. Ever since mines in New Mexico had passed under American control and efficiency, the banditti reaped rich harvests from the stage-coaches and, in keeping with the law of compensation, paid high prices.

IT HAD rained this June day and now a gorgeous rainbow was poised between the saw-tooth peaks of two horizons. The rare, dry air gave the magnificent arch a grandeur undreamed of by those shut in along misty coasts. Uncle Dick was lost in marveling at the wondrous phenomenon when the west-bound coach toiled up the slope and called him from his contemplation to raise the gate.

The coaches, the soldiers and the American freighters gave him no trouble. He never waited to discuss terms with the Indians, although they seemed to concede

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his right to control the road he had built and seldom failed to halt and ask permission to pass. The Mexicans, however, were a perpetual source of annoyance. They denied any man's right to make them pay for traveling through the mountains, and, when they approached, Uncle Dick saw to it that his weapons were handy.

The stage-coaches were ever welcome. They brought new faces as well as ready toll and patronage for the station eating-room. They brought newspapers and intimate news of the world below.

With a hospitable flourish of the hand Uncle Dick made haste to raise the gate. As the coach rolled through Uncle Dick inquired—

"Where's your guards?"

"They turned back to run the eastbound over the long division," growled "Turkey Bill," the lanky driver. Then he regretfully added: "Have to owe ye, Uncle Dick. We was cleaned out near the foot of the pass—took everything but our hides."

"Who held you up? 'Chuckle-Luck'?"

"Him an' 'Boy Charlie.'"

"Dern that Chuckle-Luck! He had supper here a week ago. Next time he comes I'll make him shell out the toll for this trip."

"You'd better shoot him dead!" wrathfully cried a passenger, climbing from the coach.

"There's no law against passengers doing that same thing," gravely informed Uncle Dick. "If the Overland people want to swear me in and give me some warrants, I'll serve them warrants on the end of a gun. Just now I'm running a station and toll-house. Chuckle-Luck pays real liberal. Trot inside, mister, and have a snack of black-tail venison and some trout."

This invitation not only sent the complainant running to the eating-room, but brought three other passengers, all males, piling out. Detaining Turkey Bill, who was keen to meet real victuals, Uncle Dick remarked—

"Thought Boy Charlie was operating on t'other side near the Vermejo."

"He's up on th' Purgatory now with a gang that's workin' both sides of the Pass," briefly retorted Turkey Bill. Then, finding the hand on his arm compelling, he sighed and added, "Joe Peace was tellin' me that a Santa Fé trader told him as how a new cuss is up here to put road-agentin' on a businesslike footin'."

"Shoo! You don't say? But the very fact a man turns road-agent works against his submitting to any authority. Reckon it's a case of Chuckle-Luck and Boy Charlie running in double harness. They may have a few hands with them today, but the same chaps will be working independent tomorrow."

"I dunno how much there is in the talk, but I spotted Boy Charlie even if he did wear a hanker over his face. Wind blew his hair back so's I seen the notch in the top of his ear where he was shot by a tenderfoot last season. Joe Peace seems to believe th' yarn 'bout a reg'lar gang. He reckons they'll run out any fellers workin' alone—either that or make 'em come into the gang."

"How many was in the gang?"

"More'n a dozen at the least. They worked it just below the Devil's Elbow. I seen eight an' there was some more back in the brush. Chuckle-Luck covered me an' Boy Charlie got the 'spress-box."

"Hard luck! Go in and feed. You're welcome as religion," said Uncle Dick. "Tell the company's agent how much you owe in toll. Surprizing that they should clean you to the hide. It ain't like Chuckle-Luck nor Boy Charlie to bother with small pickings. Never knew of them leaving a man without the price of a bed and a meal of victuals."

"Took every blamed dollar—every piece of jewelry—clean sweep," bitterly assured Turkey Bill.

"Shoo! Ain't that downright stingy? Not a bit of a gentleman's game. Well, go inside and eat. Thank the Lord no road-agent can steal a man's appetite."

Turkey Bill, abnormally tall and thin, possessed a slender brick-red neck and protruding Adam's apple that may have been responsible for his nickname. He was quick to take advantage of Uncle Dick's invitation and bolted into the station. Disdaining to eat with the passengers, whom he considered with undisguised contempt, he strode back and forth by the table, reaching over the guests' shoulders and appropriating any dish that appealed to his voracious palate. As he paced the floor and bolted his food he kept up a monologue of curses against all road-agents and particularly against those who were such poor sportsmen as to deprive a man of his last dollar.

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"Live an' let live is what I say," he proclaimed, securing his mug of coffee and pausing behind a fussy, nervous passenger who claimed Buffalo as his natal city. "Them dawgs even took my gold-nugget pin."

"Maybe they wanted it for the woman," tremulously suggested the man from Buffalo.

"The woman!" ejaculated Uncle Dick. "What woman?"

"The woman I saw," timidly explained the Buffalo man.

"He's crazy, Uncle Dick," scornfully informed Turkey Bill, forestalling another passenger who was after a slice of venison. "When they ordered me to drive on he began bleatin' 'bout a woman. Purty place for a woman—down there under th' Devil's Elbow!"

Then, addressing the Buffalo man, and speaking slowly as one might essay to impress a simple truth upon a dull-witted child, he said, "Ye didn't see no woman; *sabe?*"

But the hot food had aroused the passenger's latent manhood, and he stubbornly persisted:

"I saw a woman—a young woman. She was on a horse up on that shelf of rock. She was looking down and watching the whole affair."

"Ye didn't see no woman," thundered the driver, shifting his position to bore his stern gaze into the passenger's fidgety orbs.

"I saw her, too," faintly declared the passenger who had been robbed of the venison. "This is a barbarous country—a woman mixed up with robbers!"

"Wal, I'll be ——!" gasped Turkey Bill, staring helplessly at Uncle Dick. "This little runt never yipped afore that he seen any woman."

"You could have seen her, too, if you'd dared to remove your gaze from the brute standing at the head of the mules," said the Buffalo man, his spirits rising as he unexpectedly found his tale corroborated. "The woman was there, no doubt about it."

"Maybe a settler's girl," offered a third passenger.

Uncle Dick shook his head and fingered his straggling gray locks.

"No settlers along this division," he explained, "not even a lone man nearer than Baptiste's trading shack on Muddy Crick. Maybe it was an Injun woman. I have Arapaho women working about this station. They come and go kind of promiscu's like."

"No," firmly denied the first speaker, "she wasn't so far away but what I could see she was a white woman and dressed like a white woman. She sat there on her horse as still as a picture until they told us to git back into the coach. Then her horse wheeled back from the edge of the rock and she disappeared."

"Mebbe she's the new organizer that Joe Peace was talkin' 'bout," observed Turkey Bill, a sneer in his voice, but an expression of startled speculation in his moody eyes.

"Whoever she is, she's new to this region," Uncle Dick firmly replied. "Women aren't so plenty that we can't place all of them. Why didn't you whip up and ride through them?" this last to the driver.

Turkey Bill grunted in disgust.

"I'M hired to fetch the coach an' fool passengers through," he reminded. "If the company wants their 'spress-box fetched through an' their passengers fetched through without bein' cleaned out it's for th' company to furnish guards. We started out with four an' then had them took away to shoo Indjuns clear of the last east-bound. Injuns! Huh! I'd drive through a whole tribe."

Yielding the palm as Indian fighter only to his old friend Carson, Uncle Dick noted the long Colt's revolver strapped to the driver's thigh, a smaller Colt in his belt and then glanced through the window at the repeating rifle showing in the boot and gently remarked:

"Of course you're hired to drive, not fight, but you seem to be packing considerable hardware. But I understand now. They're to be used only against Injuns."

"They'll be used against road-agents when I'm paid to use 'em, Mr. Wooton," growled Turkey Bill.

"Of course they will, Bill," soothed Uncle Dick. "I'll send word to the company's nearest agent and have it fixed so's your pay is made big enough to turn you loose to fight as well as drive."

"We've stayed here gabbin' long enough," grunted the driver. "Any one that's goin' to ride with me has got to hump his-self."

With this warning he rushed from the station and clambered on to the box, the passengers frantically following, fearing

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lest they might be left behind. Uncle Dick watched them scramble through the door and, after the driver had straightened out his long lash in an admonitory *crack*, soliloquized:

"Sorry the day when the old-timers passed out! If Dick Curtes' hadn't been killed at the foot of the Spanish Peaks in forty-seven, and could 'a' been there at the Devil's Elbow! If he'd been there and armed only with a hick'ry switch he'd 'a' took the fighting to them. Lord! What a time it would 'a' been if Al Thorpe could 'a' set in Bill's place instead of being wiped out by the 'Paches at Pawnee Rock! Gone, all gone, the reg'lar he-critters. Old Tom Tobin or Jim Hobbs—any of the real ones! Lord! I almost wish I'd been there myself!"

He remained by the gate and stared after the coach as it lurched up the last grade and dipped from view. Then, with bowed head and thoughtful mien, he withdrew indoors and carefully oiled and charged his small arsenal of weapons.

SINCE the toll-road had opened, more than one Galloping Dick had paused at the station to partake of the excellent fare. With the plains and the mountains weltering beneath a chaos of humanity, it was neither good business policy nor sound life insurance to pry into a wayfarer's antecedents. Keepers of stations accepted guests without questions. As Uncle Dick recalled various suspicious characters who had hurriedly sought refreshment at his table, he was able to check them off as lone operators, invariably destined to enjoy short shrift. Among this gentry he was able to recall none who was capable of systematizing highway robbery. They were all good enough material for bold workmanship, but scarcely competent for perfecting an organization. Even Chuckle-Luck and Boy Charlie, both daring to rashness, could never hold a band together for any length of time.

He had known of a coach to be robbed on one side of the pass and to be held up, empty, on the opposite grade, evidencing an entire lack of communication between the road-agents. Now, out of nowhere, came the story that a master hand at business was coordinating these lawless activities. Turkey Bill had quoted Joe Peace, a well-known prospector, who in turn had heard it from a trader. Uncle Dick, however, had listened to much, in a similar vein, in the idle talk of freighters and passing soldiers.

An organized band of outlaws demanded an adequate hiding-place and an extensive base of supplies. Twenty men could not scatter and then reappear and act in unison. To be effective they must be kept together, be provisioned and ever ready to act on information furnished to their leader by spies. He looked through the window toward the Spanish Peaks, brave monuments to Dick Curtes of the unconquered heart, and sighed for his own vanished youth, for the backing of a Curtes or a Thorpe.

"I reckon we could 'a' got at the truth of it mighty sharp," he mused.

Walking to the back door, he loudly called:

"Hi! Hi! 'The Quail'!"

Almost immediately a squaw came from the cook-house and asked in the Arapaho language—

"'Cut-Hand' calls the Quail?"

Uncle Dick was held in great affection by the Arapahoes and was safe with them at any time, regardless of what wars they might be waging against the whites. He was known by them as "Cut-Hand" because two fingers were missing from his left hand.

"The Quail will ask her people if they know of any bad white men who make war on white men, who steal from stage-coaches. If they know of any the Quail will tell Cut-Hand where they hide," he said.

"Cut-Hand shall be told what he asks," she readily promised. "Some of the men of my people who come here have said the bad whites are many along the river road."

"Why have you not told me?"

She stared at him blankly and made no response. He repeated the question and added—

"Does the Quail wish to go back to her people and live in a lodge and grow thin in Winter when the buffaloes can not be found?"

A flicker of alarm shone in her small eyes, but she stolidly replied—

"Why should the Arapahoes care if white men rob white men?"

Uncle Dick tugged at his gray locks and whimsically retorted:

"Why, indeed? But now I must know. Also ask your men if they have seen or

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heard of a white woman near the pass."

She winced and in a low voice informed:

"There is talk in our lodges of a medicine-woman—a white woman—who has been seen on the upper waters of the Purgatory. One of Hosa's braves tried to catch her. He did not come back. His pony came back with blood on him."

"Served him right for chasing a white woman," grumbled Uncle Dick in English. Then in Arapaho: "She is a mystery-woman! No Indian can catch her. Bring me any talk you hear among your people."

Returning to the front of the station he gazed lovingly on each white tooth of distant peak and proudly decided:

"A whole army could hide up anywhere on either side of Raton Pass—if it could get grub. But the more there are in a gang the easier it oughter be to round them up."

His ruminations were disturbed by a clatter of hoofs and the approach of two horsemen up the north slope of the pass. Raising the gate Uncle Dick observed the two men were strangers and were mounted on superior animals. What further focused his attention were the four revolvers thrust into each man's belt. In addition to this lavish armament, each carried a rifle strapped to the saddle. Uncle Dick was convinced they were agents but his gaze remained placid as he asked—

"Riding right along or will you come in and eat a snack?"

"We'll eat if you can be mighty quick in rustling the grub," the elder of the couple replied.

Leading the way into the eating-room, Uncle Dick soon galvanized the cook-house into activity, and a Mexican brought food. Retaining their belts of weapons, the strangers dropped down at the table and ate hungrily.

They talked but little and were very courteous to the Mexican waiter. After losing the edge of their appetites they commented briefly on the excellence of the fare, but spoke nothing of interest until the younger man remarked—

"You can't mix petticoats and business without having —— to pay."

His companion silenced him with a frown and cast a quick glance at Uncle Dick, who stood gazing absent-mindedly through the window. Uncle Dick had heard the young man's declaration. It was the second time that day his patrons had mentioned a woman, and his thoughts grew speculative. Rising hurriedly, the two profusely thanked their host and promised to avail themselves of his good cheer again at the first opportunity. Then, throwing down two gold-pieces and tossing a third to the Mexican, they hastened forth as if bent on imperative business.

As they rode up the grade Uncle Dick nodded thoughtfully and mused:

"Yes, sir! If there's any truth in what I hear them two belong to the new outfit of agents, but they can't be planning to fuss with the east-bound coach at the foot of the pass, for they must know Turkey Bill has met it by this time and warned the guards to be on the watch. Besides, they won't want to operate in broad daylight so near the station, and the coach will be here before dark."

BELIEVING the coach, now somewhere laboring up the south slope, was safe from any larcenous attentions, Uncle Dick dismissed the matter from his mind. The sun completed its western path and balanced on the horizon. The dusk already had preempted the lowlands when the creaking of wheels came from the crest of the pass, punctuated by an explosive voice cursing the mules. Uncle Dick lighted his pipe and puffed a streak of blue smoke toward the top of the ridge, to the earth and sky and the world-quarters—the Indian's prayer—and stood by the road as the coach swept down the slope and came to a jangling, plunging halt.

As he recognized the driver he lowered his pipe and stared in amazement.

"Joe Peace!" he exclaimed. "How long since you quit prospecting to herd stage cattle?"

"Since we were jumped half-way down the pass in the narrowest part of the cañon," wrathfully retorted Peace, bending over to drag something from the boot. "I was inside, asleep, when they plugged the driver and stuck a gun under my nose. Cleaned me out and took the box."

"Good Lord! Killed the driver?" gasped Uncle Dick.

Peace grunted and drew the inanimate form toward the wheel. Two station employees ran forward and helped to ease the body to the ground.

"He's alive," said Peace. "Seems the lead creased his skull. Reckon he'll pull through"

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Uncle Dick gave orders for the unconscious man to be carried to a room, adding:

"I'll be right in and fix him up. No passengers, I see."

"I was the only one, and I was asleep, ——it!" grumbled Peace. "For some fool reason they sent the coach out without guards. On the other divisions they're sending guards of soldiers. Up here they let them go without a gun to protect them, excepting the driver's, and his hands are full of reins. I kept my eyes peeled till just before we struck the cañon. I'd hesitate to put up a fight when there's passengers round to get hurt, but being alone I'd planned to take the trouble to them. But nothing happened and when we entered the cañon it didn't seem that there could be any danger, so I snoozed off. If only I'd kept awake fifteen minutes longer!"

"You'd probably got shot."

"There was only two of them. I only ask a chance to risk it when no tenderfeet are round," was the fierce reply.

"No use fretting over spilled express-boxes," soothed Uncle Dick. "Come in and eat while I look at the driver. Seeing as how neither Las Vegas nor Cimarron City whisky can kill him, I reckon he'll be on his pins in a day or so. And Joe, I can give a good description of the two critters who held you up."

"You can?" cried Peace, his eyes blazing. "Tell me! They had masks on. I want to meet up with them again. Fix the driver and come back and tell me."

Long accustomed to treating gun-shot and knife wounds, Uncle Dick speedily fixed up the injured man in a workmanlike manner and rejoined Peace at the table. He briefly described the two men who had been his guests that day. Peace leaned back, his eyes blank, as he essayed to paint their likenesses on his memory. With a jerk of his handsome head he declared:

"I've got them now. I feel pretty sure of running into them down the line somewhere when they go in to blow their loot."

"There ought to be a big reward for their heads," mused Uncle Dick.

"Company's offering five thousand per head, dead or alive," informed Peace.

"Shoo! I never knew it. Let ten thousand slip away from my table," regretted Uncle Dick. Then he whimsically suggested: "It would pay you to stick round the trail and fill up a cart with the critters and haul them into Cimarron City. You'd make more that way than by prospecting."

"I may do that same thing yet," quietly replied Peace. "As to what you reckon is my fool habit of prowling round to find gold near Raton Pass, I'll show you yet that all the gold in this region hasn't been uncovered yet."

"Oh, you'll hit if you keep on long enough," encouraged Uncle Dick, then, reflectively, "But two hold-ups in a day is a little more'n the company can stand."

"What?"

Uncle Dick told of the first hold-up, and asked—

"Didn't Turkey Bill tell you what had happened to his coach?"

"He bawled out something as he went by us, but his animals were on the dead run and he had all he could do to stick to the seat. I didn't catch what he said."

"Two of his passengers swear they saw a woman on a horse up on Devil's Elbow. Say she was looking down on the road and watching the agents go through the coach."

"A woman!" exclaimed Peace, pushing back from the table and staring in amazement at Uncle Dick.

"If only one of them had said he'd seen her I'd 'a' thought he was light-headed, but two of them could hardly be took the same way, even if both was crazy. Then again, one of the agents that held you up, while sitting in the very chair you're in now, allowed it never paid to mix business and petticoats. Somehow I've yoked his words up with what Turkey Bill's passengers said they saw."

"But a woman! A white woman! Out here in the pass and up on Devil's Elbow?" incredulously protested Peace. "I can't believe it."

"Take it or leave it," said Uncle Dick, and, grinning broadly as he saw a new interest creeping into Peace's daredevil countenance: "Queer rinktums on the old trail when lovely young women stand by and watch a hold-up."

"If two men say they saw her, there must be something in it," slowly conceded Peace. "But it's mighty queer."

"What do you know about this new man some folks is saying has come up here to put a little ginger and method into road-agenting?"

Peace scowled blackly and replied:

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"I only know what's drifted out of Las Vegas. Down there they swear that Chuckle-Luck and Boy Charlie were induced to work together by a man known as Ralph—the same Ralph who worked in California ten years ago."

"But that Ralph was killed," said Uncle Dick.

"Maybe, but Las Vegas and Santa Fé say he is still alive, that he escaped to Mexico and has stayed there until now. The story is that he takes advantage of the Indian troubles to come up here and tap the trail. It's believed that he reckoned on making some rich hauls while the troops were busy chasing the redskins. You'll find men in the Taos Valley who thoroughly believe that the Ralph of California is a descendant of that Ralph who was active in Captain Pike's day, some sixty years ago."

"I don't believe it. More likely some cuss has sneaked the name, not having made one for himself. When I come here a boy with Colonel St. Vrain, the old-timers at Bent's Fort used to tell yarns about the original, simon-pure Ralph. He was some hellion. Zebulon Pike says he was credited with some five hundred killings. But of course he had only Mexicans to deal with. Used to go round as a priest or a peon, spot his victims, and do for them. But none of the old-timers ever let on that he left a son to carry on the black work."

"Oh, I don't put any particular stock in the yarns," said Peace. "But all this talk sort of makes this new chap more interesting, that's all."

"Calls himself Ralph?"

"Gentleman Ralph."

"Mighty modest cuss, ain't he?"

Peace returned the smile and said:

"If he's the same man who stirred things up in California we can look for some exciting times between the Purgatory and the Pecos. Now, I reckon I must drive that —— coach through to the next station."

"If the agents have organized you won't be held up again, if that's any comfort," Uncle Dick cheerfully remarked.

FROM early youth Uncle Dick had displayed a shrewd business mind. Many old mountain-men, on discovering their day had closed, had drifted aimlessly up and down the foot-hills, the mock of the Beaver God. Their destiny was to eke out a precarious existence until old age or the Indians sent them over the western trail. Uncle Dick, however, was quick to see the door closing on the old order.

Laboriously he had built the toll-road and obtained charters from the Colorado and New Mexico Legislatures in order that he might remain in the mountains he loved without being a prey to want. He had contributed a life of energy that the West might be accessible to home-makers, but he had no notion of losing his equity now that civilized development had gained a foothold. Aside from his commercial astuteness he felt a pathos as he viewed the shifting scenes that prefaced the incoming of the new life.

Over on Smoky Hill River the Kansas Pacific Railroad had been pushed through to Fort Harker, an iron trail that overnight transformed every region it penetrated. The day of the buffalo was ended. Stage-coaches since the early fifties had followed the ancient Indian trails. The attempt to push through the Bozman Trail to the Montana gold-fields had resulted in the Fetterman massacre, so-called. To one whose life bridged from the old to the new there was pathos aplenty.

Perhaps it was sympathy with his lost youth that inclined Uncle Dick to melancholy as he smoked his evening pipe under the stars and stared through the night toward the scenes of dead adventures. His early manhood had been molded in the stirring life of Bent's Fort and had been encompassed by the primeval. Ghosts of old companions stalked through his reverie and gave him a sense of loneliness. Never again would they ride to the trappers' rendezvous at Brown's Hole on Green River, or to the old Pueblo Fort on the Arkansas. At times Uncle Dick felt like one marooned; he belonged to a genus no longer possible, and his act of puffing his smoke to sky and earth might have been his unspoken farewell to the brave spirits who had played the part of men and who had given way before machinery.

"I reckon those was reg'lar times," he softly summed it all up.

"HO! THE gate!" Like the bark of a gun a sharp voice called.

Covering the bowl of his glowing pipe with his left hand, Uncle Dick glided along the fence. In the faint starlight he could discern three forms afoot.

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"Well, what is it? Want to go through?" he quietly asked.

With a startled exclamation the figure nearest the fence jumped back, then laughed sheepishly.

"What are you? A ghost? You nearly scared the liver out of me. Of course we want to go through. Think we come here to look at the scenery?"

"You might be in a worse business," Uncle Dick calmly retorted as he lifted the gate. "Go inside and they'll rustle you some grub."

"We've got a young woman here who fell from her horse. We want you to look after her till she is able to travel. Her nag's down the trail a bit. I'll go after him while my friend helps you to get the woman indoors."

Uncle Dick now observed that one of the figures was muffled in a blanket and was supported in an upright position by the two men. Relieving one of the men, he asked:

"Where's your horses? You men can't be afoot."

"Just back here a ways. I'll fetch them when I get the girl's nag."

The speaker turned away and made down the road. The other, aided by Uncle Dick, carried the muffled form into the station.

"She's got a bump on the head," gruffly informed the man as they placed the woman on a long rustic settee.

"Fell off her horse, eh?" questioned Uncle Dick, glancing sharply at the stranger.

He was startled to behold that one of the fellow's ears was notched just as Boy Charlie's was said to be.

"I reckon," the stranger replied, turning his back to the light.

"We found her lying in the road, her nag bolting along the edge of the pine growth."

"See that she doesn't roll off," warned Uncle Dick as he walked to the back door.

Throwing this open, he called loudly for the Quail. When the squaw entered from the cook-house he rapidly explained:

"A white woman is hurt. She is the medicine-woman I told you about. Get her to bed. I will dress her wound."

"Cut-Hand will cure her," complacently replied the squaw.

Her faith in Uncle Dick was complete. She turned back a fold of the blanket and exclaimed aloud in unison with Uncle Dick, for they were gazing upon a face of winsome beauty despite the pallor induced by her unconscious state.

"Preety!" softly cried the squaw in English. Then in her native tongue, "How did the medicine-woman walk here?"

As she spoke she gently drew back the brown hair and revealed an ugly contusion above the right temple.

"She was brought here by two men. This man——"

Uncle Dick halted and gaped blankly. The man had vanished. On the end of the settee was a handful of gold-pieces.

Uncle Dick stepped to the door and listened. Down the trail hoofs were clattering, and they were retreating rather than advancing. With a shrug of annoyance he bruskly commanded—

"Get her fixed up in bed so I can 'tend to her."

As they were lifting her from the settee the girl opened her eyes and an expression of horror twisted her features. She stared at them without seeing them. Uncle Dick noted how the pupils of her eyes widened, how her lips grimaced as if she beheld something painted by her jumbled fancies.

"Skeletons!" she faintly exclaimed. "Dead men's bones! The river! The river!"

With convulsive strength she straightened out in their arms and opened her mouth as if about to scream. Then, with a sigh, she collapsed and again became unconscious.

"Preety!" quietly admired the squaw, gathering her up in her stout arms and carrying her through a doorway.

"Dernedest queerest hold-up I ever run into," muttered Uncle Dick helplessly.

CHAPTER II

MARY JUNE

UNCLE DICK and Joe Peace sat outside the door, smoking and speculating on the identity of the fair stranger inside. Five days had elapsed since her arrival and there was no clue as to her antecedents. Not even her name was known.

Uncle Dick at first had assumed that the blow on the head was responsible for her wild words, but the hurt quickly responded to his simple treatment and there was no suggestion of a fracture. A passing army

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surgeon had examined her and gave it as his opinion that a terrific mental shock, rather than the wound, was the cause of her queer behavior. She was up and dressed but seldom left her room. She would remain for hours staring straight ahead like one in a trance. When she spoke she did not rave, but repeated the same words over and over as if recalling something memorized. Her enunciation was low and monotonous as if she, herself, grew weary of the repetition.

Peace was strangely attracted to her at first sight, but she did not seem to heed his presence on the rare occasions when she came into the eating-room. When he softly addressed her, however, she would always turn and gaze at him. One hopeful sign was the light of recognition flashing in her wide gray eyes when Uncle Dick would approach and with gruff gentleness talk to her. It was evident she was rested by his presence. The Arapaho woman also met with her approval, for one day she ventured to the kitchen and took the squaw by the hand and led her to her room, thereby signifying she desired her company.

"Getting to be quite a hospital," remarked Peace as he finished his pipe.

"The driver'll be all right to ship out tomorrow," grunted Uncle Dick," but that piece of calico gets me all muddled up. Caught both my hands this morning and pressed them to her head. What do you think of that?"

With poorly suppressed pride he lifted his square, rough hands and stared at them wonderingly.

"It quiets her when you stroke her head," mumbled Peace. "I noticed this morning how she nearly went to sleep in her chair. Poor child!"

The Arapaho woman appeared in the doorway behind them and fastened her little eyes on Uncle Dick. He impatiently demanded—

"Well, what's the row now?"

"Preety," she said.

"Preety" was her name for the fair stranger.

"She needs me?" asked Uncle Dick sharply, rising and laying aside his pipe.

The squaw turned and disappeared. Uncle Dick accepted her abrupt withdrawal as an affirmative and, growling a complaint but with his kindly eyes revealing his eagerness to help the unfortunate, he entered the station. Peace lounged in after him, his dark, handsome face sober and frowning. The girl had made a tremendous impression on him.

Uncle Dick was surprized to find the girl in the eating-room. She was standing by the fireplace and plucking idly at a fan of dried grass that ornamented the rough shelf. She did not look round at their entrance but continued staring at the fagots in the fireplace. Uncle Dick was reluctant to disturb her and stood undecided, waiting for her to come to him. Peace sank into a chair where he could watch her profile. Uncle Dick fumbled at his chin and glanced helplessly at Peace. The girl now began, speaking with disquieting precision;

"Skeletons—dead men's bones. The walls of the cañon are very close together. The river crowds the ledge until it is only a narrow strip, hardly wide enough for horses in single file. The water makes a loud noise and tells awful secrets. Dead men's bones and——"

With a quiver that registered over her whole slight figure, she pressed her hands to her eyes and opened her mouth as if to shriek, but made no sound.

She had spoken and acted thus many times. Her abrupt pause and the uncompleted sentence was always followed by the pantomime of shrieking.

"Dead men's bones and what?" gently murmured Peace.

He had argued with Uncle Dick that should she complete the gruesome statement, they might obtain a clue that would establish the locality she referred to in her wild speech.

"Shhh! None of that," fiercely whispered Uncle Dick.

But he had no need to be alarmed. The girl was unconscious of Peace's prompting. Bowing her head, her lips fluttered, and they knew she was whispering the same words she had uttered aloud. In proof of this there came the little shiver; the head was raised and the lips parted as if to cry out.

Uncle Dick exclaimed profanely under his breath and, advancing, placed his hands on her shoulders, gently induced her to sit and them began stroking her head with his strong hands. Over his shoulder he softly remarked—

"Her talk about the cañon and the river makes me think of the Purgatory."

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"No more than any other of a dozen rivers that flow between high walls," murmured Peace.

"She ain't crazy," continued Uncle Dick," only she don't seem to hear any one speak. Like as if she was asleep. I've tried questioning her a dozen times, but there's something between us I can't get by."

The girl lifted her hands and caught his palms and pressed them convulsively.

"You poor thing!" pitied Uncle Dick, his heart aching for her. "It's a —— shame, you poor child."

Suddenly the door at the end of the long room opened and the wounded driver stood on the threshold, one arm in a sling, for he had been shot through the arm as well as wounded in the head. Resting his free hand against the door-casing for support and wagging his bandaged head peevishly, he announced:

"I'm goin' to get outer here tomorrer, sure pop. When a man's dog-sick an' can't git a friendly drink o' licker it's time he goes where he can be treated right."

He had managed to strap on his belt and, fumbling at the long revolver, he staggered a few steps into the room.

The girl was facing him and at first stared at him without perceiving him. Then came a dramatic change as the driver's bandage slipped down from his scalp and rested across the bridge of his nose, allowing only his eyes to be seen. The girl stiffened and, throwing both hands to her head, screamed in terror.

Peace leaped across the room, roughly pushed the driver back into his chamber and rebuked:

"You fool! You've scared her about to death. Keep out of sight."

Turning back, he beheld Uncle Dick at the girl's door delivering the patient into the care of the Quail.

"What'n ——, Joe, set her off like that?" Uncle Dick helplessly asked. "Think I could 'a' pulled her hair, or been rough with her in any way? My old hands ain't as soft as they might be."

"Nothing like that, Dick. It was the driver. The fool looked a fright. That bandage slipped down and made him look hideous."

Uncle Dick pondered thoughtfully and finally agreed:

"Maybe it was that, only she ain't 'peared to notice things before. The driver did look mighty unwholesome.

"With that bandage across the lower part of his face he made me think of an agent."

"Road-agent!" ejaculated Peace.

"Yes, sir!" Uncle Dick struck his fist on the table violently." I reckon I assayed out someting top-high, as you prospectors put it. I reckon I hit the right note without knowing it. We never found out how she was hurt or who brought her here, but I'm sure the two men who fetched her was agents. The driver, with his ugly mug half-covered, made her remember some things."

"Wish the sight of him had made her finish out her sentence of 'Dead men's bones and ——'" muttered Peace. "Then we might have something to go on."

"When I was taking her to her room I heard her whisper, 'And gold.' Maybe that's what she's been leaving unsaid."

Peace pursed his lips and scowled.

"It doesn't make any sense," he said.

"None of it makes sense," snorted Uncle Dick, now walking the floor and waving his hands. "But one thing's sure as shooting: There ain't no stage-driver nor any other human being that's going to fuss that little girl up if I know myself, and I reckon I do."

"A river flowing through a cañon—skeletons and gold," mused Peace.

"That seems to be about the sum of it," snapped out Uncle Dick. "A pretty mess of stuff for a young girl to have to tote round in her mind!"

Before Peace could make any reply the Arapaho woman thrust her head from the girl's room and softly said—

"Preety!"

"Oh, Lord! What's happened now?" groaned Uncle Dick, hastening forward as the squaw opened the door for him to enter.

Peace made as if to follow him, thought better of it and threw himself on the settee.

ON ENTERING the room, Uncle Dick was nonplused by the marvelous change that had come over the girl. The pallid face was flushed; the eyes, while brimming with fear and excitement, were sentient. She took a step forward and, for nearly a minute, searched Uncle Dick's compassionate eyes intently,

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read them truly and thrust out both hands. He took them and patted them, holding the two in one broad palm, but he felt weak and helpless when she whispered—

"Who am I?"

"Holy Hen!" he spluttered. "Why—er—s'pose you tell all that to your Uncle Dick."

"Uncle Dick," she slowly repeated. "Did I ever have an Uncle Dick, I wonder?"

"You sure got one now," he warmly declared.

"I know I'm a person. I can identify myself that far. I can almost see pictures of a wide plaza. There's the Alameda—*Alameda!* Where did I get that?"

As she halted and gazed half-frightened into his sympathetic face he promptly returned:

"In Santa Fé, That's where you got that. I'll bet a jug on it. Young woman, you're beginning to remember things. Now don't you fuss any. You got a tunk on the head that's made you forget a bit. Army surgeon said something about your brain being clogged—that something would jolt your memory awake some time. By Hen! The cure's beginning, and I'm tickled to death."

"But who am I?" she persisted, and, with a little shudder, added: "I must have a name. I must be some one—not just something."

"You've got a name and a derned pretty one," he warmly assured. "It'll come hopping back to you any minute. Till it does—lemme see. It's the tag end of June. Once I knew a likely young girl who was called Mary. S'pose we call you 'Mary June' till things clear up a bit?"

"Mary June," she softly repeated. "Yes, I like that. I like you. I know you've been very kind to me. The sisters used to say—the sisters!"

"Convent!" cried Uncle Dick. "I knowed the first shot from the gun that you didn't talk like homespun girls that come across the plains in wagon-trains. You've lived in a convent in either New or Old Mexico. Now you just take it easy, and if things don't straighten all out in that brain of yours mighty soon I'll take you to Santa Fé and find out all about you. Now you're getting along so well, I want you to step into the next room and meet a young friend of mine, a young man that's been a heap worried about you."

She walked by his side into the eating-room, but made to draw back abashed when Peace impulsively advanced, his hands outstretched.

"This is Joe Peace," said Uncle Dick, placing one of her hands in Joe's. "Joe, this is Mary June—almost well again."

"I've been mighty much concerned about you, Miss June," cried Peace. "That you're getting well is the best news I ever heard."

"But I don't remember things," she sighed, withdrawing her hand. "There was something, something I was afraid of, I think. If I could get back of that I'd know all about myself and to whom I belong."

Uncle Dick stirred up the envy in Peace's soul by quickly reminding:

"You belong to me, my dear, till some one can claim you. I reckon that Mary June will have to change mighty soon to Mary Wooton. That is, if you could stand for the name of Wooton."

"You're good to me," she whispered, touching his hand to her cheek.

Gliding from him, she hastened back to her room and the waiting Arapaho woman.

As the door closed on her, Joe Peace exploded:

"That girl is thoroughly normal now, even if she can't remember her past. Isn't that so, Uncle Dick?"

"I reckon that's so," agreed the mountaineer.

"She needs a protector!"

Uncle Dick smiled and quizzically remarked:

"But she's got one—me—Richens Lacy Wooton. Queer how young men are keen to see the need of beautiful young women having protectors."

Peace frowned, then laughed and confessed:

"My cards are all down, face up. She's completely upset me. But the game's open and I'm going to make a try. No harm in that, eh?"

Wooton's face took on the stern, rugged lines of the gray walls banking Raton Pass as he quietly warned:

"Not too fast, lad. Till she gets back her name she's my girl."

"Meaning you object to me as her husband?" hotly demanded Peace.

"Take your spurs off, Joe," cautioned Uncle Dick. "We'll give 'Miss Preety' a chance to learn who she is before we plan

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any husband for her. If she don't pick up right smart I'll take her to Fort Leavenworth and have the surgeons examine her. But I don't reckon it's any physical hurt. Something give her an awful shock and clogged her mem'ry, just as the army surgeon said."

"And it'll take other shocks to restore her," mumbled Peace.

"So I reckon. The stage-coach driver give her one, and she's remembered a lot. When she gets another jolt she'll remember more, maybe all."

"But what if she never remembers the past? She's still normal from now on," persisted Peace. "She has a right to her life—to happiness."

"Never a truer word said, boy," readily agreed Uncle Dick. "But happiness doesn't absolutely mean she's got to rush off and get married to the first likely-looking chap that wants her. But say she did marry a chap, then had her mem'ry come back and tell her she knew some other chap she liked a heap better. Her happiness then would become misery, eh?"

"Not a chance in a million," was the optimistic reply.

"Well, maybe not, but my girl can't even take that one chance. And again, for all we know she may be already married."

This suggestion caused Peace to drop back heavily on the settee, his face reflecting the concern the thought was giving him. Then his visage hardened and he declared:

"If she's married her man ought to be here to take care of her. I'll wait a decent length of time but I'm making the game."

"You'll wait till I say the word before you show your hand," was the calm retort. "And I'll bet a jug you don't hanker to start any love-making on these premises against the wishes of your Uncle Dick."

Peace forced a laugh and exclaimed:

"Hang it, Uncle Dick, have pity on a fellow! Why not test her mind a bit. So far she's talked of the sisters and the Alameda."

"Slow and careful. I'll do what I can to find out who she is and how in Hen she ever come wandering up Raton Pass. The two critters who fetched her here makes it all the more queer—the way they dusted from this station after telling me that they found her lying in the road. Who is she? How came she up here? How did she get hurt?"

"I'm impatient but I don't want to be unreasonable," sighed Peace, rising and walking away.

For the rest of the day he avoided Uncle Dick's company, yet kept near the station in hope of seeing the girl. Night came, however, without his having caught a glimpse of her. Securing his horse he rode down the south slope into the shadows.

THAT evening as Uncle Dick sat alone in the doorway the girl came from her room and gained his side without his hearing her. His first intimation of her presence was when her hand rested on his head. With never a tremor to advertise his surprize, he reached up and patted her hand and sought to draw her down beside him.

"No," she resisted, pulling on his hand. "Come inside to the light where I can see you. We're alone?"

"No one here but the help and they're in the cook-house," he answered, rising and leading her back to the table.

"I've spoken of the Alameda and the sisters but I can't remember anything about them—just vague pictures that may be imagination, or that may be real," she murmured. "Now here's another. And it troubles me. It's so clear that I've sketched it out. What comes before or after, I don't know. Whether it's a real place or a picture of a place, I don't know. Here! Look!"

She placed before him a scrap of paper containing an excellent sketch of a tumbling river shut in by high cañon walls. The composition was grim and forbidding, as if some of the tragedy in her mind had crept through the pencil. A narrow trail clung to the right bank of the river, and on the edge of this stood a stunted pine, twisted and distorted by the elements, misshapen as if tortured by Furies, yet tenaciously holding to life.

He stared at the sketch admiringly, then down at the slim hands and softly cried:

"Mary June, you're a reg'lar artist. That's what I call a real picter. It beats the picters drawn by a fellow called Catlin, who was out here when I was breaking into the country, all holler."

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"But have you seen that place? Do you recognize it?" she anxiously asked.

"Maybe," he guardedly replied. "It's much like several places I've seen, only I don't remember that pine. Looks like the devil had given it a mauling. Still, I've seen so many sickly pines along Raton Creek that no single one would probably stick out in my mem'ry."

She gave a little despairing sigh and fingered the pencil nervously.

"I hoped you had seen it," she said.

He hesitated, fearing to upset her mental balance, then risked saying:

"Before you got better you kept speaking of such a place. You said the cañon walls was close together, and there they be, as true as life. You 'lowed the river kept whispering secrets——"

"Whispering!" she softly exclaimed, an expression of alarm clouding her gray eyes. "But it was men that whispered, not the river. They stood apart from me and whispered. But, if I learned what they whispered about, I can't recall it now."

"How do you know all this?" Uncle Dick sharply demanded.

She twisted her hands and shook her head.

"It's gone, yet I can almost see the men —almost hear them whispering."

She was silent for a few moments, then murmured:

"Now it comes back again. They're whispering about me."

"Hoity-toity! There, there," soothed Uncle Dick, patting her hand. "We're getting all fussed up again."

"But I'm not afraid of the men. I mean I wasn't afraid when they stood off away from me and talked. Did I say anything else about the river or the trail under the cañon wall?"

"Not a blessed word," assured Uncle Dick.

She drew the paper to her and poised the pencil, then sank back irresolute.

"You was reckoning to add something to the picter?" he gently queried.

"It's an impression. It's a crazy notion. I—I fear I haven't recovered as much as I had hoped," she groaned.

In great alarm Uncle Dick opened his mouth to call the Arapaho woman, then was inspired to advise:

"Chuck it down on the paper. If it's on your mind you won't feel comfortable till you've got it out. Never mind how silly it seems. No one will know but you and me. Maybe it'll help you to stop thinking about it."

She took the paper and bent over it as if to shield it from his gaze. He leaned back and stared at the ceiling. At last she timidly pushed the paper before him, saying:

"It doesn't mean anything. It doesn't belong in the picture and yet it seems to be a very real part of it, now that I've drawn it."

Uncle Dick smiled genially and bent forward only to exclaim in amazement at beholding several skeletons of human beings against the the wall of the cañon, back of the pine.

"I'll be cussed!" he faintly cried.

"Oh, I know it's awful," she sobbed, trying to draw the paper away from his grasp.

"It's sense! You talked about them before you got better," he informed, staying her hand and staring round-eyed at the tiny figures. "I didn't go for to mention it for fear it would upset you. But now you've put them down, it all goes to show you're beginning to remember. Funny place for dead men's bones, though."

"It should be quite dark around them," she absently informed.

"Why?" he shot out.

With a little start she stared at him blankly, then grew puzzled and slowly answered:

"Why? I don't know. Just seems as if it should."

"But you've got them plastered up against the cliff," he protested.

"I know. It seemed idiotic when I drew them, yet that's the only place they seem to belong."

He pursed his lips and studied the sketch anew. Its excellence as a sketch was destroyed because of the skeletons. It was now a grotesque impossibility. He stole a sidelong glance at her brooding profile and felt a chill. The drawing, as she had completed it, contained the gruesomely absurd motif one might expect from a diseased mind. He fought against the suggestion as she lifted her head and turned to him appealingly. Rapping the paper with a finger, he promised:

"Mary June, you're all right in the head. Don't forget that. Don't fret. You'll

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see no dead men round these parts. You just sit tight and get strong. I'm going to find that spot just to prove to you that you're all hunky-dory. You was hurt near here. This picter place must be near here. I ain't prowled round these old mountains ever since I was nineteen to be tripped up in finding a spot so all-fired well pictered out as this bit of a river cañon."

"You're good," she replied simply, clasping both hands over his broad shoulder. "The other man, Mr. Peace—you won't show it to him, or say anything about it to him, will you?"

"Not if you don't wish it," he promised; "but he's done lots of prospecting and might be able to spot it the first thing."

"No, don't! He might laugh at me."

"What!" roared Uncle Dick.

"Not so bad as that, perhaps, but he'd think I was worse in my mind," she modified.

"I'd hate to find a man laughing at any of my women folks," growled Uncle Dick. "'Specially if he had folks who'd feel cut up over his passing out. Now you take it easy. Stick close to the station. I'm going to be gone for a few days."

"You think you may find this?" she asked, tapping the sketch.

"I'll at least make sure it ain't in this neighborhood. I'll say good-by to-night, as I shall hit the trail early. The Arapaho woman will look after you. Some of her relations will be hanging round to see what they can steal, but don't be afraid of them."

"You're running into danger. You may meet Indians."

"Most of them are up Smoky Hill way. I sha'n't meet any but Arapahoes, and I'm something of a pet with that tribe. Little Raven and Yaller Bear both have told me that they're willing to meet Colonel Leavenworth and sign a treaty. Even if they don't sign a treaty, but make it a reg'lar fight with Hancock's men, I don't reckon they'll trouble me. Not to put too strong a point to it, Miss Mary, they're rather fond of me. I've mixed with them ever since I was a younker, so don't fuss any."

That night before retiring he visited the cook-house and found the Quail entertaining several of her people. There were three men and as many women in the party, and, by the air of complete satisfaction on the several countenances, Uncle Dick knew a collation had been served at his expense.

"My Arapaho brothers are welcome," greeted Uncle Dick.

"*Haul*" grunted a tall brave, bolting the chunk of venison he had attempted to hide in his cheek.

"Cut-Hand is always glad to see the warriors of Hosa. I am going away. You will stay here till I come back."

Guttural satisfaction was expressed. Uncle Dick continued:

"I leave a white woman in care of the Quail. My brothers will watch over her if she walks from the station while I am gone, and see no harm comes to her. Big Knife will see to it that she is here when I come back."

The tall brave grunted explosively. Uncle Dick motioned the three men to follow him, led the way to the living-room and tapped on the girl's door. She opened it and started back at sight of the Indians.

"Mary June, these are my friends. They will be your friends. They will be here while I am gone. You won't see much of them, but they will always be at hand to keep an eye on you," explained Uncle Dick.

Stepping back, he waited till she had closed the door. Then he softly informed—

"She has been touched by the Great Spirit." he said, tapping his head.

"The white squaw is a medicine-woman," muttered Big Knife, his gaze shifting about uneasily.

"How do you know that?" demanded Uncle Dick.

"Arapahoes have seen her riding along the upper Purgatory. Little Pony followed her and never came back. His pony came back."

Big Knife's bearing now suggested fear of the supernatural.

"Little Pony's heart was bad," said Uncle Dick. "Those who follow her to save her from hurt will be making big medicine. Where did she go when she rode along the Purgatory?"

"Some say she changed into a beaver and swam under the river. Some say she turned into a Thunder-Bird and flew into the sky," mumbled Big Knife.

"She is a mystery-woman," conceded Uncle Dick. "Those who watch over her will grow very strong and have full stomachs."

"Cut-Hand will find the mystery-woman here when he comes back," assured Big Knife.

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The Indians' recognition of the girl widened the possibility of establishing her identity. One point of contact with her former life was on the lonely banks of the Purgatory. The mountaineer already had pondered over the other problem. How did she come to be with the two men who brought her to the station? These strangers were road-agents. Their story of finding her in the road rang false. The suspicion that the outlaws knew the history of the girl recalled the statement of Turkey Bill's passengers regarding the white woman on Devil's Elbow, who had watched the hold-up of the stage-coach. White women were too scarce in and around Raton Pass to allow much confusion of identity.

"Seems to be two trails what might lead to a discovery of who she really is," he mused. "One goes to the Purgatory, the other to the gang of road-agents."

THE lowlands were still vague with the mists of early morning when the first rays of the sun painted the top of Raton Range and gave the signal for Uncle Dick to mount his horse and ride down the north slope of the toll-road. The way led between masses of gray rocks and thick growths of pine. At one point the road crossed a plateau, left by nature to hold a small lake. The mountaineer paused by this tranquil sheet of water to admire the Alpine plant-life mirrored in the clear depths. It was a favorite spot with him, and his errand was seldom so pressing that he could not pause for a minute to enjoy the beauty of the scene and contrast the limpid loveliness with the stern and harsh surroundings.

This morning he had scarcely reined in his horse when something whipped by his head and plopped into the lake, creating a tiny geyser. Almost at the same moment he caught the muffled report of a gun. His brain worked automatically, and he found himself spurring his horse to the shelter of the pines at the foot of the western wall, his rifle half-raised as he scanned the wooded heights. Some one, red or white, had attempted to kill him. He waited a few minutes, thinking the assassin would descend to the terrace. A shrill whistle rang out high above him, and almost instantly was answered from a point farther up the pass.

"Not Injuns!" he grimly exclaimed, riding down the slope and keeping under cover of the woods. "A white man's signal, I'll bet a jug. If I had some of the Arapaho bucks here I'd have those gentlemen's hair before sundown. —— a road-agent! A gold-piece for a dinner, and a bullet in your back! Once I get Miss Mary's troubles all fixed up I cerainly will interfere with their business. When they worked alone and was sure to run into a noose or a hunk of lead, it wa'n't any of my partic'lar business, but this organizing into a company is carrying a joke too far. Those two signals show they're stretched all along the ridge above."

Reaching a turn in the road, he quit the cover of the pines and urged his horse into a gallop. At the bottom of one long declivity, where the morning sun had not yet penetrated and where the shadows rendered him obscure, he reined in and turned in his saddle. The lateral sunbeams were tinting the sky-line with yellow glory. The top of the slope was sharply revealed. As he waited and watched, a horseman came round the turn and behind him rode others. The mountaineer counted ten men. Against the bright background they seemed silhouettes cut from black cardboard.

"I ain't hankering to have them at my heels," Uncle Dick explained to his horse, and, raising his rifle, he fired at the leader.

The shot threw the band into confusion. There was a scrambling and milling of horses, then in a bunch they swept back from sight. Uncle Dick rode at a reckless pace down the road, every rod taking him deeper into the gloom of the lowlands.

CHAPTER III

THE DEAD MAN'S MEDICINE.

OCCASIONAL pines, stunted in growth, fought for existence at the mouth of the pass. Uncle Dick halted and reconnoitered his back trail where it emerged from grim buttes. Satisfied that none of the outlaws were following him he resumed his course for Muddy Creek, a tributary of the upper Purgatory. He sought the small trading-station kept by Baptiste, a mixed blood. In externals Baptiste was all Indian, and his red ancestry thus far had protected him from wandering war-parties. His immunity was further assured because of the lively traffic he carried on in whisky and firearms.

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The volatile blood of the trader's father, a French trapper, had drawn him to the forts and settlements when a youth and, when he returned to exploit his dusky relations over the counter, he was equipped with the rudiments of a white man's education. Uncle Dick had known him for years, and no love was lost between the two, for the mountaineer had been instrumental in preventing Baptiste's appointment as an Indian agent. Yet it was to this man who, he believed, would cheerfully shoot him in the back, that Uncle Dick was now compelled to go in search of information concerning Miss Mary.

"Wouldn't trust him alone at the bottom of a thirty-foot well, but if he knows anything about the girl I'll have it if I have to shoot it out of him," Uncle Dick grimly decided.

A gallop of a few miles and the mountaineer was clear of the broken ground and well up to the straggling cottonwoods which hid the trader's store from view. Carrying his rifle across the saddle, for the nature of his reception was doubtful, Uncle Dick allowed his mount to slow down to a walk.

Suddenly two dull reports boomed out in quick succession and sent the mountain man to the ground with his rifle raised to resent what he first fancied was an attempt at assassination.

A moment's reflection reassured him and he ventured to stand erect.

"That was a heavy Colt fired twice—else two of them fired once apiece," he mused. "Didn't hear any lead sing by. Reckon it wa'n't for me."

He was puzzled and waited a full minute for developments. Then again came the double explosion.

"I always reckoned the Injuns would turn on Baptiste some time, but so long as that gun keeps talking it shows they ain't got him yet," he soliloquized as he cautiously advanced toward the cottonwoods.

As he realized there was an entire absence of shouting, always characteristic of an Indian attack, he questioned his first solution of the mystery. Where his view of the open plain was uninterrupted he looked in vain for racing ponies. Nor was any foe lurking in the cottonwoods directly ahead, so far as he could perceive.

Boom! Boom! rang out two shots.

This time Uncle Dick swore peevishly. Why always two reports? Nine times out of ten any mystery at the foot of Raton Range was a trap. He loosened the long revolver in his belt and played with his rifle as he endeavored to decide what course of action he should pursue. The art of minding one's own business had saved many lives in the Rockies, yet he had come for information and, while not inclined to press his quest into a zone of gun-fire, he had no relish to relinquish his errand until convinced it was hopeless.

Baptiste was obviously having trouble. Baptiste was one man who might know something about the girl. Ordinarily the trader's demise would have met with the mountaineer's entire endorsement, but just at present he wished him to continue alive.

For the fourth time the gun, or guns, spoke twice. Thoroughly irritated and convinced no Indians were participating in the affair, Uncle Dick climbed into his saddle and boldly rode to the edge of the grove. Dismounting and throwing the reins over the horse's head he stole forward until he had a full view of the trader's store. His eyes opened wide in surprise when he beheld a second shack across the creek and facing Baptiste's. The last time he had passed that way the breed ruled the lonely spot alone.

"That's been built some time this season," muttered Uncle Dick. "And not a sign of life anywhere," he said, failing to discover any human being along the creek.

A more detailed scrutiny revealed further puzzling features in the situation. The doors of both shacks were open, as were the small windows. Over the windows blankets were hung, so it was impossible to see what was going on inside. As Uncle Dick combed his scattered locks with one hand, a heavy revolver was suddenly thrust from beneath the blanket over Baptiste's window and was discharged. As if enacted before a mirror, a hand appeared almost at the same moment from under the blanket across the creek, and the two reports rang out almost together. The blankets twitched a bit as the heavy bullets registered.

Uncle Dick smiled in relief at this partial explanation of what had been a mystery. It was plain some stranger had set up his abode on the creek and that he and Baptiste had had a difference and were striving to settle it by an eccentric duel.

"Some one trying to jam in and get some

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of the trade," murmured Uncle Dick, beginning to find much enjoyment in the little drama. "Baptiste wants to hog all of it."

Now the newcomer took the initiative, but Baptiste proved every whit as prompt in returning the fire. Uncle Dick chuckled boyishly.

"Shooting from behind a blanket and not seeing what they're shooting at," he scoffed. "Both hugging the floor and reaching up and firing blind—wasting their lead when they may need it before morning to stand off Satanta and his Kiowas, or Roman Nose and his Cheyennes. If the Cheyennes ever cut loose they may forget Baptiste has some of their blood in his veins and remember only that he's cheated them like sin."

Suddenly the program was varied. The revolver appeared under the blanket at Baptiste's window and remained there while the breed jumped to the open door and fired a rifle. A howl of rage sounded from the other cabin, immediately followed by the appearance of a young man in the doorway. He was armed with two revolvers and, remaining in full view, he began spraying Baptiste's building, impartially raking door and window. Having emptied his guns, he receded from view. Like a jack-in-the-box Baptiste popped up at his door and resumed firing with his rifle.

TIRING of the inconclusive battle and fearing lest Baptiste might fall by a chance shot before imparting the desired information, Uncle Dick stepped from cover and in a stentorian voice called out:

"Hi, both shacks! Quit that dod-burned fooling long enough for me to do business!"

The window blankets fluttered ever so little as the hidden duelists peeped out to observe the intruder. With his rifle over his left arm, the muzzle covering the stranger's shack, with a revolver in his left hand ready to rebuke any assault from Baptiste's store, Uncle Dick advanced briskly. Reaching the store-door he turned, waved his hand to the cabin across the creek and commanded—

"No more fooling or you'll settle with me!"

He paused on the threshold of the store until his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom; then he laughed silently. Baptiste was in a corner, out of range of any bullet from across the creek, and he was fortifying his fighting spirit with a dipper of rum and a long strip of cold meat. Meeting Uncle Dick's amused gaze, he scowled villainously.

"What's this foolishness mean, Baptiste?" Uncle Dick demanded.

The trader, already showing the effect of his potations, presented a strange picture of his two bloods. His dark face, characteristically Indian, remained somber and expressionless, but his arms and elbows hunched and flopped about as if to say—

"What would you have?"

"Your new neighbor making trouble?" persisted Uncle Dick.

"—— fool!" Baptiste grunted, taking a huge mouthful of meat and washing it down with a big swallow of raw spirits.

"So you've renewed your arrows and taken the war-path, eh?"

Before Uncle Dick could prevent him, Baptiste leaned forward and thrust a revolver under the blanket and fired. The shot was greeted by a cry of anger, and Uncle Dick dropped to the floor as a stream of lead whistled through the riddled blanket.

Remaining prone, the mountaineer drew bead on the trader and harshly commanded:

"Drop that gun, you brown sucker! Fire another shot while I'm here and I'll wipe you out. You know *me!*"

Baptiste sullenly dropped his weapon to the floor and glared malignantly. He then seized his dipper and drank deep. Crawling to the door Uncle Dick waved his hat back and forth and called out:

"You, feller, over there! Quit that shooting!"

"Then quit shooting at my home!" was the wrathful reply, and a piece of lead plunked into the casing of the door within a foot of Uncle Dick's head.

With a snort of rage Uncle Dick shoved his rifle forward and peppered the window. Baptiste joyously grabbed up his revolver and fired blindly.

"Drop that gun, you infernal devil!" roared Uncle Dick to the breed, reenforcing his command with the muzzle of his rifle. "Didn't I tell you to quit that business?"

"I was helping you," mumbled Baptiste as he threw aside the revolver.

"Say, that's a pretty way to talk peace to a man," called out the stranger.

Uncle Dick rose and stepped into full view, lifted one hand and ordered:

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"No more shooting. Baptiste has quit. He's put up his gun and is armed only with a dipper of licker. I ain't got but a little time to spend here, and I've come far to talk business, so just leave your irons in your shack and come over."

"Like —— I'll come over," was the jeering retort. "The way you've acted since lining up with that hound oughter fill me plumb full of confidence, eh? Git out of sight. I shall commence shooting directly."

"Look here, feller. I don't usually ask folks twice to come and see me. You heard me speak—me, Dick Wooton."

There was silence for nearly half a minute; then in a curious voice the stranger inquired—

"Are you Uncle Dick Wooton who keeps the toll-gate up in Raton Pass?"

"I be."

"Then I'll come over. I'm depending on you to stop that dog from trying to murder me."

As he finished speaking he emerged from the shack, a tall, raw-boned fellow with a whimsical, freckled face and light-blue eyes. Wriggling his open hands before him to show he was unarmed, he splashed through the shallow creek and, with brisk step, came up to the door of the store.

Uncle Dick stood just inside to keep a watchful eye on the sullen trader. Satisfied the breed had had enough of fighting, he gave his attention to the stranger and peremptorily demanded—

"Who might you be to come a-helling round these peaceful waters and raising Hen with an old trader like Baptiste?"

"Name's Keene, Sam Keene. I'm a trader, too," replied the young man, grinning vacuously.

"Trader, eh?" mumbled Uncle Dick. "I see—trade-war. Means both of you'll lose out."

"Bah! He's a fool!" growled Baptiste from his corner.

"Maybe I am, but it don't follow that a skunk can shoot me up," Keene retorted spiritedly.

"How long you two been fighting?" asked Uncle Dick.

"Ever since sunup," cheerfully replied Keene, now seating himself and fanning his heated face with his ragged hat. "But you're mistook somewhat. We wa'n't fighting over any trade. We was fighting over a funeral."

"A funeral?" gasped Uncle Dick.

"The miserable white cheat!" fumed Baptiste, staggering to his feet and refilling his dipper with rum.

"You say that again and I'll come in there and mount you, visitors or no visitors!" hotly warned Keene, thrusting his head inside the door.

Uncle Dick pushed his head back and motioned for Baptiste to be quiet.

"You two quit your chinning or I'll make it my funeral," he threatened. "Now, Mr. Keene, what do you mean by your strange words about fighting over a funeral? Whose funeral was you fighting over?"

"The feller that come in here last night with a hole drilled through him from side to side. He died some time after midnight, and we dug a grave on the bank of the crick and buried him."

"Shoo! That was neighborly. Go ahead."

"Before we planted him we looked through his clothes to see if we could find anything that told who he was. He'd refused to talk—wouldn't tell his name or anything. We didn't find anything except a small buckskin pouch tied round his neck. Baptiste said it was his medicine-bag, like what Injuns wear. Being part Injun himself he didn't want to touch it, he said. He said we must bury it with the owner—the low-down——"

"Tut, tut," cautioned Uncle Dick.

"Anyway, I agreed, not wanting to meddle with the religion of a dead man. We left it on his neck and planted him and took a drink and turned in. But just about sunup I'll be derned if I didn't catch that low-down cuss of a Baptiste fussing round the grave. What d' you s'pose? He'd gone to work and dug the man up in the dark and had took off the buckskin bag. He thought I was dead asleep.

"When I looked out he had finished filling in the grave and was making to open the bag. I fetched a yell and took a shot. He dropped the bag and run in here. I started to get the bag when he begin shooting at me from the winder. What kind of neighborly action do you call that? I hustled back under cover, and that's all. We've been keeping tabs on each other ever since."

"I see," mused Uncle Dick. "Who'd the man say he was?"

"Told you once he didn't say," Keene reminded. "He was a tall sucker; rode a good hoss. Nag's feeding round here somewhere. Piece gone from the top of one ear

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We give the man a drink of whisky, even if he was pretty leaky. He said something 'bout the game being up, and pegged out. Then this onery hound of a Baptiste robbed the body——"

"It is a lie!" snarled Baptiste, his small eyes glittering as they rested on the revolver he had placed to one side. "I am of Cheyenne blood. The medicine-bag round the dead man's neck could mean nothing to a white man. The dead man took it from some Indian. It belonged to me. What has this man Keene to do with Indian medicine-bags? Why is he out here in the Indians' land? If he had pitched his shack alone somewhere, his hair would have been cured and dried and cut into legging-fringe long before this. The Indians will not hurt me, and they have kept away and spared him because they believed he was my friend. Now they can have him. I won't even roll out of my blankets when I wake up some night and hear them dragging him out of his shack. Trader? Bah! He knows nothing of trading. His goods are such stuff as a trader might have brought out here when you was a boy, Mister Wooton."

"They was sold to me for trade goods back in Westport, Missoury," sighed Keene. "But I reckon the cross-blood is right when he says I ain't cut out for a trader. Still, I ain't nobody's fool and I'll see what's in that buckskin bag before I pull my stakes."

"The bag is mine!" yelled Baptiste, edging a moccasined foot forward preliminary to springing for the revolver.

"You're going to lose a hoof in a second," warned Uncle Dick, resting one hand on the hammer of his rifle.

BAPTISTE drew back and Uncle Dick picked up the revolver and thrust it in his belt. Then he informed.—

"You two fellows will stand outside the door and watch me go and get the bag."

Keene willingly took up his position, but Baptiste cursed softly under his breath as he joined him. Uncle Dick walked down the creek a short distance to a raw mound of earth and found the pouch. As he turned to retrace his steps slowly, he loosened the string and beheld a piece of paper. A single glance and he became tensely interested and deftly extracted the paper before reaching the two traders.

Seating himself between the men, he opened the bag and shook out a tiny gold cross and two nuggets. The latter were almost pure gold. Baptiste's eyes glittered wolfishly as they beheld the nuggets.

"Two chunks of gold and a piece of jewelry," murmured Keene. "Pretty good medicine for a white man to have, I reckon. How'll we divide it?"

Uncle Dick broke a twig into two pieces and directed:

"Man drawing the longest one has his pick of the nuggets. He'll probably choose the biggest one."

Exposing the ends of the pieces of twig, he extended them to Baptiste, who hesitated, then made his selection. As Keene held up his piece he disgustedly cried—

"It ain't losing the big nugget, but I hate to have that skunk beat me!"

"Both of you are pretty well paid for burying the man," consoled Uncle Dick. "Now I reckon 'll take this little gold cross as my share in stopping the waste of good ammunition. Any kick? If so, fix a fair value and I'll buy it."

Keene flushed, saying—

"Keep it and welcome."

Baptiste took it between his fingers and examined it critcially; then contemptuously announced—

"I make you a gift of it, Mister Wooton."

"Very generous and noble-hearted of you, Baptiste, seeing as how it's plated and worth about six bits," grinned Uncle Dick. "Now that the trading and the fight is all over I want to ask a question. Have either of you ever seen a woman, a white woman, round these parts?"

"A white woman!" yelped Keene, his eyes popping wide open. "Lordy! I ain't seen a white woman since I passed a wagon-train two months ago 'way up the trail. She was thin and yaller and was smoking a pipe. I reckon she'd look some handsome to me now, though."

Baptiste's reply to the unexpected query was not so spontaneous. He turned aside, collected his firearms and placed them on a shelf before curtly saying:

"No white women ever come to Muddy Creek. Sometimes squaws, but no whites."

"Did either of you ever hear of a white woman being seen anywhere along the Purgatory?" persisted Uncle Dick.

"Not me," readily answered Keene, but now his eyes were half-closed.

Baptiste shook his head as if bored by the

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queries. Uncle Dick eyed them truculently, especially the half-breed. Turning to the latter he said:

"You're a liar, Baptiste. Injuns come here. They tell you things. They come to to the top of Raton Pass and tell me things. They're more free to talk with you than they are with me. The Arapahoes tell me a white woman has been seen riding alone along the Purgatory very recently. If they'd spill that much to me they've told more to you because you're part Injun."

Passing over the slur on his veracity Baptiste shrugged his shoulders and calmly repeated:

"No white women come here. I've heard of none on the Purgatory. If your Arapahoes have seen one, they've told me nothing."

"Ever hear any talk about road-agents?" abruptly asked Uncle Dick.

"Why do you ask that?" queried Keene in a drawling voice.

"Just my bedeviling way of getting folks fussed up," growled Uncle Dick, stealing a glance at Baptiste. The breed's face was as devoid of expression as a wooden mask, but his fingers twitched nervously.

"Every one hears about road-agents these days," said Keene.

"Few folks come here except Indians to trade," slowly added Baptiste. "I don't remember them mentioning road-agents. Month ago a small scout of soldiers stopped here and 'Colorado Frank' said stages were being held up south of the Pass."

"None of the agents ever come here, eh?"

As Baptiste opened his mouth indignantly to explode, Uncle Dick shot in—

"They often stop at my place."

"No road-agents have ever come here," solemnly declared Baptiste.

"Reckon that's right," agreed Keene.

"I reckon you folks got another think coming," quietly declared Uncle Dick. "Boy Charlie, running-mate of Chuckle-Luck, has been here, and you two have talked with him."

"That's a——" choked Baptiste, but Uncle Dick reached for his throat and hissed—

"Don't you give me the lie, you half-Injun!"

As the breed fell back from the clawing hand Keene remonstrated:

"But that's coming it a little raw, Wooton. I don't know what men Baptiste has met, but I've never seen and talked with any Boy Charlie."

"Maybe I oughter explain that you not only talked with him but you've buried him," qualified Uncle Dick.

Keene stared in amazement, then turned and glared at the mound of fresh earth.

"Meaning that?" he whispered, nodding toward the grave.

"Just that," murmured Uncle Dick. "You two been trying to shoot each other up over a hundred-odd dollars' worth of gold and didn't seem to know who'd furnished them."

"A five-thousand-dollar funeral!" gasped Keene.

"Then you do know a reward is offered for every one of them critters, dead or alive?" sharply asked Uncle Dick.

"I know. I took it for granted a reward was offered. It's usually five thousand a head," faltered Keene.

Baptiste, who had remained rigid during this brief exchange, now excitedly demanded—

"Do you mean, Mr. Wooton, that the man we buried is an outlaw and that five thousand is offered for him, dead or alive?"

"Just that," assured Uncle Dick. "You two dig him up and cart him to the nearest fort or settlement and get your money. The notch in the top of his ear would identify him anywhere 'twixt —— and Santa Fé."

Keene shivered with disgust and mumbled:

"I'm a poor slouch at trading, I reckon. I don't want any of that trade. Not for a million."

Baptiste said nothing, but his eyes glittered as they ranged toward the grave.

Uncle Dick rose, saying:

"Well, having stopped bloodshed, I 'low I'll be moving along. Better smoke a pipe together and bunk in one cabin. If I read the signs right there's going to be a heap of trouble before the steam-engine tracks reach the upper waters of Smoky Hill."

"Wait a minute," begged Keene, who sat with hands clasped over one knee and head bowed in deep reflection. "It's like this: If I stay here I'll get so lonesome I shall either shoot up Baptiste, or else he'll pot me when I ain't looking. S'pose I go with you?"

"I never hankered to have company forced on me," regretted Uncle Dick. "I'll tell you what you do. Go up to the station and take time to decide what you'll do.

"When I get back I'll have a talk with you.

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Maybe you'd like to try prospecting along with Joe Peace. If so I'll grub-stake you if you need it."

"I won't need any stake if Baptiste will buy my goods."

"I'll buy the rum. Goods no good," was the breed's curt response.

"Pack your truck up to the station. If there's anything the Arapahoes want I'll dicker for it. Got a horse?" said Uncle Dick.

"Two mules," joyfully cried Keene. "I'll be there, Uncle Dick, waiting for you. I'm no good as a trader, but maybe I'll do better hunting gold. If your friend will take me as a partner I believe I'll do well. Come on, Baptiste, measure out the rum."

"Perhaps my friend will take you and perhaps he won't," warned Uncle Dick. "You're a tenderfoot at gold-hunting, I take it, and he'd scarcely want to share even with you. Still, he needs some one to cook and do squaw work while he hunts color. No harm for you two to talk it over. So long."

He walked back and procured his horse, and, as he rode down the creek, he could hear the two men arguing violently over the purchase price of the trade liquor.

"Baptiste has dealings with the road-agents, and that grave will prove it. He won't open it for the reward," muttered the mountaineer. "Just how Keene stands will be shown when I have a talk with him at the station—that is if he goes there."

ONCE out of sight of the two cabins he drew forth the piece of paper he had surreptitiously extracted from the buckskin bag and studied it exultingly. It was a rough facsimile of the sketch made by Mary June. Where hers had contained artistic merit, this effort, taken from the body of Boy Charlie, suggested only a working-plan—a crude map. Pains had been taken to include the lone pine, its stunted and distorted growth even being emphasized. This pains to identify the pine among innumerable similarly weathered ones proved that to be the key to the location. Only in one particular was the map different from Miss Mary's sketch. The skeletons, which she had so bizarrely added to her composition, were wanting. In their place was a small cross. Beneath it were the figures 56.

After gazing at the paper until every detail of the map was photographed on his mind, he secured it inside his shirt, swung aside and pursued a course that would strike the Purgatory below the mouth of the creek. And as he pressed forward he exclaimed aloud in a pleased voice:

"Well, it shows the little girl wa'n't crazy when she drew the picter. There is such a place and it's up to me to find it. Once there I ought to pick up her trail and follow it till it fetches me plumb up to my own door."

Then he remembered the absence of any skeleton from the second drawing and his kindly eyes clouded.

"Maybe that Boy Charlie didn't know how to put in skeletons," he hopefully mused. "Anyway, there ain't any more sense in writing 56 against the cliff than there is in decorating it up with dead men's bones."

In planning the trip Uncle Dick had a major and minor purpose. His most important objective was the Purgatory. The girl must have been injured within a few miles, at the most, of the toll-gate. Her sketch had brought to his mind a recollection of the Purgatory where it ran between high walls. The two men who had brought her to the station had avoided scrutiny and returned the way they came. From the start he had tagged them as outlaws. The bullet fired at him on the plateau was undoubtedly discharged by a road-agent. Could he identify any stretch of the Purgatory as being the original of the girl's sketch, he believed he would have one end of the tangled skein in his hand.

The visit to Baptiste's cabin had been included in his plans on the slim chance he might surprize the trader into letting drop some bit of information that would corroborate his belief that the mysterious woman seen on the river was Miss Mary. Big Knife, the Arapaho, had so identified her. Uncle Dick was chary of placing full credence in an Indian's testimony, especially seeing that none of the Arapahoes had, according to their own testimony, succeeded in securing a close view of the woman.

Fate had dealt more kindly with his quest than he had ever hoped, when it was permitted that he should accidentally stumble upon the map. It was the same composition as the sketch. How the outlaw came to possess it was a mystery, but the circumstance furnished the second point of

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contact with the girl's life of the activities of the robbers. The other was the woman the passengers saw on Devil's Elbow. This line of thought led him back to contemplate the attempt on his life made near the mountain lake. Here he was hopelessly puzzled. He could account for it only by one of two theories; either he had been mistaken for some one else, or neither of the two men who had taken the girl to the station could have been present when the shot was fired.

"There wouldn't be any sense in their taking the risk and the bother to fetch Miss Mary to me to cure and care for if they was willing to wipe me out on sight. If they wanted me to take care of her they'd naturally want me to live to keep on doing it. One of them had a notched ear—Boy Charlie. Some one drills him through and through and he rides to Baptiste's store and croaks. Wonder where he got that map?"

These baffling meditations filled his thoughts for several miles, and he had swung in close to the foot of a towering and detached butte when he was startled into keen attention by the musical call of a bugle sounding retreat.

His first thought was that a party of soldiers were falling back before a superior force of Indians. Slipping his rifle from under his leg, he jumped to the ground. He pricked his ears and marveled that a bugle should sound the retreat when there was never a single rifle-shot to advertise an engagement—neither a shot nor a war-cry.

It was deathly quiet at the foot of the butte, and, as he stood with every nerve strained, he began to wonder if he had actually heard the call or had mistaken some bird-note for it. He found the enigma poignantly disturbing, as it almost smacked of the supernatural. He would have denied that he was superstitious, but it is seldom that one lives for thirty years among a people without absorbing something of its belief. The foundation of the religious life of an Indian is his belief in magic power. When something happens it is because some one has done something. When the cause is seemingly inexplicable, it is easily perceived by explaining it by magic.

While Uncle Dick would not go so far as to accept the mental attitude of his Arapaho friends, and attribute the bugle-notes to good or evil spirits dwelling among the buttes, he was profoundly disturbed that he should hear a bugle in a desolate and empty region where he knew there was no bugle.

Quitting the base of the butte, he slowly threaded his way among lesser masses of rock, muttering:

"If any of Hancock's men are out this far what in Hen be they blowing a trumpet for? If they're falling back, what are they falling back from? And why don't I hear their horses? That bugle sounded derned near."

He cast a glance over his shoulder at the grim top of the butte. The silence continued and he made a brave attempt to make himself believe it had all been the work of his imagination.

"Any one would be crazy to go tooting a trumpet out here. There ain't no trumpet out here. I was just day-dreaming and thought I heard——"

The forceful ejaculation was accompanied by a startled jump and was caused by the mellow notes of a bugle sounding close at hand. This time it ordered the advance.

"Well, ding-bust me!" he weakly cried, leaning against his horse and mopping his face. "Seems that me and a trumpet are out here all alone."

Then, shaking himself alert and thrusting forward his stubborn jaw, he advanced rapidly through the broken rocks until the plain opened to view. The plain was empty; but, directly ahead and partly sheltered by a low ridge of boulders, was a small encampment of Indians. He smiled in great relief, although there was still much to be explained. He could not understand why the camp should be so devoid of life, for he could make out no figures either lounging at rest or moving about.

THE central lodge was larger than the others, and beside it stood an army ambulance. Looking more closely he discerned a team of mules up the bank, busily grazing. Then he understood and whispered—

"Kiowas!"

Slipping behind a small boulder, he flattened out on the ground and made an inventory of the situation. The fact that there were no scouts out evidenced a presumption of perfect security. It was the ambulance and the mules that stirred his drowsy recollections into identifying the band as being Kiowas. Now that he knew this he was in

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no wise surprized when an Indian wearing a major-general's full uniform appeared in the opening of the big lodge and lifted a bugle to his lips. The advance and the retreat were played with exquisite skill. Other calls followed, each fittingly given. At last the warrior lowered the bugle and lifted his head, and Uncle Dick obtained a square glimpse of the dark face. He stiffened and toyed with his rifle, whispering to himself:

"Satanta! The old devil! Hancock gave him that uniform last Summer. Lord only knows where and when he stole the ambulance. Now what mischief is he planning?"

Satanta—White Bear—was the most dreaded of the Kiowa chiefs. He combined a soldierly knowledge of strategy with the eloquence of the born orator. Army officers held his abilities in high esteem, despite his hostility to the whites. Many proclaimed him as rivaling Pontiac and Tecumseh in oratorical efforts. That he should be here, on the upper waters of the Purgatory, accompanied only by a small following while the center of interest for the plains tribes was along the Smoky Hill River, could be explained by Uncle Dick only by one theory. He was to hold an important conference with leaders of allied tribes and did not intend that the army officers should suspect his purpose.

As he watched the great chief, Uncle Dick knew he had solved a puzzle which two years before had fooled his friend Kit Carson. Carson, as colonel of the First New Mexico Infantry, led a detachment of troops, augmented by Jicarilla Apaches and Utes, against the allied Kiowa, Comanche and Apache tribes on the South Canadian. The hostiles fought so fiercely that the famous Path-Maker was glad to retire, his two howitzers permitting him to save his troops.

During that battle, which lasted all day, Carson told Uncle Dick that some white man was with the Indians and was equipped with a cavalry bugle. This man, identified as a white man solely because of his proficiency with the bugle, echoed every call of Carson's bugler with the opposite call. When Carson's bugler blew advance, the bugler among the Indians would at once sound retreat. All of this was more or less confusing to the troops. Carson had insisted it was a white man, masquerading as an Indian; that only a white man, familiar with army post life, could play the bugle so famously. Uncle Dick, however, knew Satanta was present at the fight on the South Canadian, and what he had now witnessed convinced him the "white man" was no other than Satanta himself.

The mountaineer tugged at his long locks and frowned over the problem in his path. He was impatient to withdraw from the neighborhood of the camp and continue his search into the history of the girl. Opposed to this was his wider sense of duty, urging him to learn the wily savage's plans. To enter the camp would be to invite acute personal danger. But it was not the thought of peril that caused him to hesitate, as he had thrived on dangers since he was nineteen years old.

But there was Mary June at the top of Raton Pass, nameless, homeless except as he gave her a home, and helpless for want of memory. He had assumed the responsibility of acting her protector, yet he realized that the welfare of one person should not count when it came to preventing the horrors of a general uprising, and he knew that Satanta's presence on the lonely Purgatory could mean only plans for a wholesale massacre.

He studied the camp moodily, counted the ponies and concluded no emissaries from the Sioux, Cheyenne or other tribes had arrived as yet. He scanned the north and east, where he had an extended view of the open country, and discovered no sign of approaching horsemen.

"Satanta'll treat me all right if he reckons I don't suspect anything," he mused. "But if any other redskins come in while I'm with him he's liable to stop my talking. Well, I s'pose some one's got to find out what the slippery cuss is up to, and Uncle Dick seems to be elected for the job."

Crawling back to his horse, he mounted and rode with a clatter over the soilless ledge. By the time he came in sight of the camp the lounging braves were erect and grasping their weapons. Satanta, an imposing figure of a man, erect and graceful in his bearing, still stood before his lodge, one hand resting the bugle on his hip, the other clasping a heavy Colt's revolver.

Uncle Dick threw up his right hand and called out:

"Settainte! Cut-Hand, friend of the Arapahoes, comes to smoke with you."

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The chief remained immovable, his dark face impassive. Then suddenly he simulated gladness and, putting up his revolver, advanced to meet his guest. As he shook hands and smiled, however, his gaze, Uncle Dick noted, remained focused on the big butte to see if others lurked there in hiding.

"Heard your music, Settainte," cordially said Uncle Dick, using the correct Kiowa form of the name rather than the Anglicized version. Dismounting and still retaining the chief's hand, he warmly assured—

"I forget that I am tired and have traveled far, now that I see you."

"Cut-Hand is welcome," heartily responded Satanta, his black eyes continuing to flicker from the mountaineer to the butte. "Let his friends come in. Settainte loves the white men."

"I am alone. I was riding to the Purgatory when I heard your music."

"You thought the soldiers were here and you found the Kiowas?" was the suspicious query.

"No, no. The soldiers do not blow the retreat," Uncle Dick boldly retorted.

"They did the Winter Black War-Bonnet Top died," grimly reminded Satanta, referring to the fight with Carson on the South Canadian. "The soldiers took our first village, then we pushed them back. We fired the grass and crept near them in the smoke. Lean Bear carried the medicine-lance of the Tonkonko and sang the war-song of his order as he advanced. Stumbling Bear killed a soldier."

The chief could not resist this bit of boasting.

"Colonel Carson said you had a white man with you to blow the bugle," said Uncle Dick.

Satanta placed the instrument to his lips and ran through several calls, then proudly replied:

"I was the man. It was a good fight. We saved all our horses and kept all our white prisoners. If they had not had their big guns, we should have killed all the white men."

"But now you are at peace with the whites you are glad you did not kill them," said Uncle Dick.

"I am glad," softly said Satanta, bowing his head to conceal the great hate burning in his eyes. "I love the white man, but I have eaten wild meat all my life and do not like his corn rations—they make my teeth hurt."

"You are not on the trail to Old-Man-of-the-Thunder?"

"We have promised Colonel Leavenworth to sign a treaty with the Great White Father at Medicine-Lodge Creek when the leaves fall. Then we'll take the white man's path. Now I follow some Utes who stole our horses. Where does Cut-Hand ride?"

"To the Purgatory. I am glad I found you. It is good medicine for me, for you can help me. You can tell me something."

"The friend of Little Raven of the Arapahoes asks; Settainte, the White Bear, gives," was the laconic reply.

The chief turned back to the lodge and stood aside for Wooton to enter.

UNCLE DICK had been quick to notice the absence of any women. Satanta himself unrolled the strip of carpet for the mountaineer to sit on, a display he made only when wishing to honor a guest. Next he produced some boards, three feet by two, decorated round the edges with brass tacks, arranged them before Uncle Dick and called out a command. An aged Indian soon appeared with a kettle of deer-meat and a smoking buffalo-hump and placed them on the improvised table. The mountaineer ate heartily. When he had finished Satanta lighted a pipe and, after a whiff, passed it to his guest. This ceremony being completed he reminded—

"Cut-Hand needs help?"

Uncle Dick nodded. Pulling back a corner of the carpet, he drew a rough map on the well-trodden earth, explaining it as he worked, by saying:

"These cañon walls are very high. The river runs swift as a deer between them. Here is a twisted pine, made sick by bad medicine, yet living. Do you know such a place on the Purgatory?"

Satanta studied the earth-map through half-closed eyes; then, lifting his head, he answered:

"I know much of the river. I never saw a place like that."

"Then there isn't any such place on the Purgatory," sighed Uncle Dick, convinced that the chief was lying to him. "I forgot to put in here these little marks. They're dead men's bones—ribs of men long dead."

The hand holding the long pipe gave a convulsive jerk. For a moment Uncle Dick believed he saw fear shining through as brave eyes as could be found on the plains.

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"Now you remember it?" pressed Uncle Dick.

"No. Dead men's bones are sometimes bad medicine. I can not help you. There is no such place on the river."

"I hoped you could help. I must be going," said Uncle Dick regretfully.

"Wait!" grunted Satanta, rising and stepping to the opening and murmuring some words to a young buck. Turning back, he explained: "I love the white men. Cut-Hand is my brother. I wish to help him. One of my men who is now hunting a buffalo cow knows the river better than any other Kiowa. I have sent for him. He may know what Settainte does not know."

Uncle Dick thanked him, lighted his pipe and composed himself to wait. Satanta asked—

"You look for gold?"

The mountaineer darted a quick glance at the lowering face and demanded:

"Why do you ask that, White Bear? You know I am too old to hunt for gold. When life is young, in the Great Bud Moon, one hunts for gold and women, but not in the Real Goose Moon. I only ask to live in peace on top of the mountains."

Satanta tersely observed:

"White men want gold all the time. It is gold that brings them into the Indians' land to scare and kill the buffalo."

With his thoughts flashing back to the two nuggets found on Boy Charlie's dead body, Uncle Dick persisted:

"You speak of gold because we have spoken of dead men's bones. Why?"

"Gold and dead men are always found together," replied the chief, his face devoid of expression. "If the white men would take all the gold in our country and then go away, we should hold many sun-dances."

"But there is no gold on the Purgatory."

"Then there will be no dead men there," added the chief.

"But the Arapahoes say there is a white medicine-woman who rides along the Purgatory," abruptly informed Uncle Dick.

Again the flicker of fear, perhaps of the supernatural, pricked through the dark eyes.

"The Arapahoes tell stories to frighten their children and then believe them themselves. How could a white woman live alone on the river?"

"I did not say she lived alone. There may be white men with her."

"There are no white men on the Purgatory except those who pass back and forth hunting gold."

"Then she may live there alone because she is a medicine-woman."

Satanta refused to comment on this possibility.

For nearly an hour the two sat opposite each other in silence. Uncle Dick's long experience told him he was a prisoner, and that should he attempt to leave the lodge he would be detained by force if necessary. At last the young buck swirled up to the lodge, his pony in a lather, and, as Satanta glided to the opening, called out:

"There is no sign of our man. He has gone very far after the cow."

Turning to Uncle Dick the chief said:

"You hear? Our man can not be found. But I want to help Cut-Hand, and I will send some of my men to the river and tell them what to look for; then I will send word to the top of the mountain so my friend can know."

"That would slow up your chase of the horse-stealing Utes. I can soon ride to the river and look for myself," protested Uncle Dick.

"One who lives in the Real Goose Moon should not ride off alone to such places," advised Satanta. "If my men took you for a gold-hunter they might forget my orders and hurt you."

Uncle Dick realized that the chief, for some reason, was threatening him with death if he pushed on to the river.

"I will go back to Raton Pass. It is true I am growing old. I am very tired. I shall have gifts for any Kiowas who bring me word."

With that he mounted and rode toward the butte while a small band of braves made a pretense of galloping toward the river. Never once did he glance back at the camp, although he would not have been surprized had an arrow or a bullet whipped after him, once he was outside the zone made safe by laws of hospitality. Not until he had turned a shoulder of the butte did he allow himself to believe that he was actually free to go back to the pass.

"The lying devil!" he grumbled, halting and dismounting. "Sent for one of his men who knew the river? Bah! He was afraid some of the leaders from the other tribes were about to come into camp and, before deciding whether to kill me or turn me

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loose, he sent a buck to make sure no Dakotas were along the sky-line. If any had shown up they'd had my hair off by now. Wouldn't let me go on to the river for fear I'd meet some of the visiting chiefs.

"And the red devil did recognize the picter. The bones nearly jolted him into dropping something. He lied when he said the picter didn't mean any place on the Purgatory. The place is there and I'm going to look it over, even if the whole Kiowa nation says I can't—then I'll go back to Mary June."

HE RODE briskly for an hour, then turned into a pocket in the buttes and ascended a broken wall until he could reconnoiter his back trail. Two Indians on ponies were cantering over the rough ground, pausing to pick up his trail in the extensive areas of dead moss, circling ledges when at fault. Satanta had taken no chances on the mountaineer's doubling back.

Uncle Dick had taken no pains to conceal his trail, and wherever the soil permitted his horse's hoofs to register, the signs were plenty and plain enough. There was a likelihood that his plan of stealing by the camp and gaining the river might be balked; it all depended on the next few minutes. If the Indians kept on they would find where he entered the pocket and would guess his true purpose. Just what Satanta had ordered to be done in such an event was not hard to imagine.

Uncle Dick slipped down the wall to his horse and saw to it his weapons were ready. The minutes passed and the warriors did not appear. Clambering back up the wall, he could detect no signs of them.

He knew he would save time by waiting until night, when he could swing wide of the camp and take to the open country and travel fast. The hours lagged, but with the red man's adamant patience he bided, revolving thoughts of Mary June who had lost herself. This led him to speculate on the road-agents and their mysterious leader, known as Gentleman Ralph.

Repeatedly and always vainly he essayed to determine how the outlaws came to be linked to the girl's sad story. Boy Charlie, one of the two to bring her to the station, had passed on. Uncle Dick made a shrewed guess that Boy Charlie's companion that night had been the notorious Chuckle-Luck. He wondered if Chuckle-Luck had fired the fatal shot and, if so, why? What had they quarreled about? Not the girl, for they had shoved the responsibility of her care on to honest shoulders.

"Dead man's bones and gold are bad medicine," Satanta had said. Well, Boy Charlie was dead and his nuggets divided between the traders. Lastly, Satanta's avowal that he purposed to sign a peace treaty at Medicine-Lodge Creek rang falsely, considering his secret mission in the shadow of Raton Range. Satanta had said he would send warriors to the Purgatory, ostensibly to seek the information Uncle Dick required. The mountaineer had seen the men depart. He had no doubt but what they did proceed to the river, but with instructions to kill any white man found loitering there. With the return of the two trackers the chief would be satisfied that the toll-gate keeper had returned home, and the warriors, on reaching the river and finding no signs, would not tarry.

Night came, with only starlight to help or hinder him. Sacrificing a blanket, he muffled his horse's hoofs and made his way back to the Indian camp, halting in the black shadows of the giant butte. Leaving his animal, and armed only with his revolver and knife, he proceeded to the edge of the camp and hid behind a rock. A fire burned brightly in front of the central lodge.

After an hour's waiting several warriors galloped up and, by their brief exchange of words with the camp guard, Uncle Dick identified them as the men dispatched to the river. Satanta, aroused by the noise, appeared in view for a moment, then retired into the lodge.

Uncle Dick began crawling away, eager to complete his détour and gain the river, when a thin call out on the plains brought him back to the rock. The call was repeated and immediately caused much bustling in the camp.

"Kiowa scout coming back with visitors —the Injuns that old Satanta has been waiting for."

More fuel was heaped on the fire. The voice from the plains grew louder, and Uncle Dick, from his recumbent position, could catch the jarring thud of several horses racing in his direction. The horsemen burst from the darkness as if breaking through a curtain, some twenty of them, and Satanta in person hastened to welcome them, even before they could dismount.

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The light from the brilliant fire aided Uncle Dick none in identifying the new guests, as each was muffled from head to moccasin in a blanket.

The first of the newcomers to leap from his horse threw back the hood of his blanket enough to reveal in his black hair a feather tipped with red and deeply notched near the top, signifying he had scalped an enemy and cut his throat. This manner of advertising his prowess indicated he was a Dakota. Still holding his blanket close, he made some rapid signs with the fingers of one hand. Uncle Dick even ventured to lift his head clear of the rock in an effort to catch this sign language, but another warrior maneuvered his pony so as to mask the nimble fingers.

With evident enthusiasm Satanta placed his closed hand on the left side of his head and raked the thumb across the forehead to the right and away from the head. Then he dropped the hand with fingers extended, a short distance before the right of the body, and brought it inward, quickly thrust it forward as if to shake hands, lifted two fingers, closed the hand except for the two extended fingers and passed it from right to left in a downward curve. Finally he held his two clenched fists before his breast, palms down, and, with a dramatic flourish, swept them outward and downward.

With a shiver Uncle Dick mechanically interpreted this sign talk in a loud whisper:

"Two years ago the white people promised to be friends with us but they lied. That's all."

The ponies were turned out to graze and Satanta ushered his guests inside his lodge.

"The old devil meant the Little Arkansas Treaty," mumbled Uncle Dick. "The chap with the notched feather was a Dakota. Lord! If the Dakotas mix up in it there'll be some real trouble. If Satanta gives the pipe, that means the Comanches and Apaches are with him as a matter of course, but if the Dakotas and Cheyennes join hands in the game it'll take more'n Hancock's men to hold them. Colonel Leavenworth is the man to make the Kiowas back up. Satanta don't intend to go to Medicine-Lodge Creek for any treaty. Leavenworth must know about this and get after him. He can do more with the Kiowas than a whole army can do. Sorry, Miss Mary, but your business must wait just a little bit till I can send a talk to the colonel."

Suddenly his meditations were broken by the impact of a heavy body dropping on his back. He rolled aside and clutched a throat just as a yell of discovery sounded from his assailant's lips. Instantly the camp was in commotion. Uncle Dick's fingers dug deeper to prevent a second outcry. His assailant, gasping for breath, endeavored to use his knife, then concentrated his efforts in tearing at the implacable fingers. In the camp the warriors were rushing madly about, seeking the source of the outcry. Finally one young buck, venturing toward the rocks at random, caught the sound of threshing bodies and yelled shrilly. At once he had the full pack running behind him. With a supreme effort Uncle Dick gathered his knees, straightened his legs and pushed with his hands at the same time. Then he glided away in the darkness, leaving the half strangled scout to explain to the enraged Satanta.

TO BE CONTINUED

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Clay John

By Arthur O Friel

Author of "The Sloth," "The Jaguar," etc.

YOU say, *senhor*, that in your United States there is a bird which you call the oven-bird, because it builds on the ground a nest made of grass and leaves, shaped something like an oven, with a little hole in the side where the mother goes in and out.

Here in Brazil we have the same bird, or one much like it. But our bird is not a lazy little thing like that one of yours, for he does not have his nest on the ground but makes it up in a tree as a bird should do. Nor is he satisfied with such common materials as other birds use. He builds with red clay, which he fastens into the fork of a branch, so that when his work is done he has a very fine little red house swinging up in the air. And because of this clay house of his we call him *João de Barro*, which in your language means "Clay John."

No doubt you two American explorers have seen this bird, or his house, while you were in the Brazilian and Peruvian jungle along the Javary River, so I will say no more about him. But I can tell you a tale which I think you have not yet heard—the tale of a man who, like that bird, was called "Clay John." His story will serve to pass the time while the river-steamer carries us on down the Amazon, and it will interest you, I am sure, for he was from your America and he had a strange experience in the great rubber country where I was working at that time.

There were several odd things about this man. One was that his name really was Clay John, only it was the other way around—John Clay. Another oddity was his ability to take ordinary clay and make it into men. The strangest thing of all was that in the end he picked up a fistful of wet clay and found there—something of which you shall hear.

He was fighting for his life when we met him. There were six of us, and we had been sent out into virgin territory, far from the outermost workings, to locate new rubber-trees. For days we had cut our way through the jungle, scouting for caoutchouc but finding nothing worth while. Now we were becoming discouraged, for our food was running low, and it seemed that we must soon turn back empty-handed after all our work.

Our chief, Prudente da Gama, told us that this day would be the last, and that if we still failed we would go back. So we were working forward in a half-hearted fashion, expecting nothing but another hard day of failure, when we heard a shot.

It was off to our right and not far away. We swung toward it and traveled very quietly to see who it might be that had a gun in such a place. Before long we heard a voice, low and faint in the bush. It seemed not to be talking to any one else, that voice, but to be babbling in a crazy sort of way, and soon it rose into a screaming laugh that made us turn cold and look at one another, for it was not the laugh

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of a sane man. Then it was silent for a while, and we crept up nearer, looking for a *tambo*, or at least a hammock slung in the trees, but we saw nothing of the sort.

Presently we reached a place where the jungle thinned out. There one of my mates hissed softly, and as we stopped he pointed across a small opening to a dead tree. On its bare branches sat more than a dozen dingy black vultures with their heads all turned toward us. While we were looking to see what they waited for, the voice broke out again, seeming to come from the ground before us.

"Not yet!" it said. "Not yet, you black ghouls!"

Then out from the foot of a large tree burst a flash and a crash, so near us that we all jumped. The vultures on the dead branches jumped too, and some of them flew up. Then the voice chuckled, and the chuckle turned into a giggle, and that grew into the screaming laugh we had heard before. It broke suddenly, and we heard a mumble and a moan. After listening a little longer, we slipped around the tree and saw the man who lay on the other side.

One look at his shrunken face and glassy eyes showed us what ailed him—starvation and the terrible Javary fever. He was not tall nor broad and now he seemed nothing but a bundle of bones. Yet what there was of him was clear bravery, for, though he was too weak to drag himself farther, and though he was lost and alone far out in the pathless jungle, still he was fighting for life.

He had sheathed his revolver and, with shaky hands, he was doing something with a little shiny tube. So dazed and crazed he was that he did not even know we were within arm's length of him, and we stood there and watched this queer thing he was doing.

The tube had a needle on the end, and he slipped this needle into his arm and squeezed, then pulled it out again. We had never seen anything like this before, but later on we learned that the needle was hollow, and that through it he squirted heavy doses of quinin into himself.

He put the little tube back into a shirt pocket very carefully, as if it were the most precious thing in all the world, and then he looked up at the vultures and cackled once more. After that he reached his skinny claw-hands above him to a vine and tried to pull himself up.

Then Prudente spoke to him. He stared at us with eyes that seemed to bulge out of their hollow sockets; his hands dropped, and the right one went to his gun. Prudente seized that weak arm and held it while he took the weapon himself. The man kept staring at us and finally whispered:

"Men! Live men! One—two—four—six men!"

Then he went limp and fainted.

HE LOOKED so much like a dead man that for a moment we thought he had died from the shock of seeing us. But soon we found that he still lived, and we did what we could to revive him. While Prudente and I were working on him, the others looked about for his equipment but found that he had nothing at all except what might be in his pockets and his revolver and cartridge-belt, which was nearly empty. Whatever else he might have had was now back in the jungle somewhere.

Thinking they might find some of it for him, the men spread out and worked back into the bush in various directions. They discovered nothing of his, but one of them did find something which was vastly more important to us, and just as John Clay opened his eyes this man's yell came to us through the trees—

"Rubber!"

Prudente and I jumped, and the shouts of the other men answered that of the first as they started toward him. We stayed with our sick man, though we were anxious to go and see the rubber-trees too. After a time the men came in and told us there was a fine caoutchouc district off to our right, and they thought it would be big. Later we found that this was so. We were just at the edge of a rich rubber forest, but if we had not heard John Clay's shot and turned that way to seek him, we probably would have missed it all.

Of course, this meant that we did not go back the next day, nor for several days thereafter. Food or no food, we had to explore this virgin tract and take samples of the rubber so that Coronel Nunes, the master of all this great estate, could decide whether the new lands were worth working. So, though all we had left to eat was some dried fish and a little *farinha*, we stayed and worked from dawn to dark.

John Clay we put into a *tambo* which we built, and there we did all we could for him;

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though that was little enough, for we were not doctors. Yet the fact that we were taking care of him helped him much, for now he did not have to fight the horror of being sick and starving all alone in the bush. And thus, through our attention and his own drugs, he won through the fever and got back some strength and a clear head.

Even before he could stand on his feet he began to smile. It was a thin, haggard smile, but a plucky one, and later we were to love him for the smile he had and the brave spirit that lay behind it.

There was no smile on his face, though, when he told us how he came there, for that was a thing at which only an idiot would have laughed. He had come over the great mountains in Peru, he said, with a party of explorers from your United States who sought the site of a great golden city, the tale of which had brought the Spaniards and others from Europe many years ago.

Of course, they knew there was no golden city such as the old stories described, but they believed there might once have been a town which had given rise to such tales, and that its ruins might be found in eastern Peru or western Brazil. They wished to locate this old place for the sake of science—whatever that may be.

They had gone through many hardships in Peru and ought to have turned back, but their leader was very stubborn, and so they kept on and came into Brazil, intending to work northward toward the Amazon. Then, after they reached our country, the Peruvians who had been guiding them refused to go farther and finally left them.

Still, they had come to know the bush quite well and they thought they could go through to the great river without guides.

They might have done so, though they had little food and were weakened by hardship and sickness, if it had not been for one thing: Their guides had not led them right, and they were far away from where they should have been. This they learned when it was too late to go back and so they could only go on. And they did go on, growing weaker all the time. One by one they dropped and died, until this man whom we had found was the only one left.

It is an old story, *senhores*, that of the death of white men at the headwaters of the Amazon, but it is always terrible. To us it seemed a pity that these fine men should throw away their lives seeking a thing that would do them no good if they should find it. If they had hunted rubber or gold, we could have seen some sense in it, but John Clay said that, if they found such a town, all they could do was to go home and write a book about it, and that most people would not read that book anyway.

He also said that he himself cared little whether the town was discovered or not, and that he had come only because he wished to see South America and to take photographs of any odd things which the expedition might meet.

Now all his photographs and the rest of his equipment were far behind him, lying wherever they might have fallen when he cast them aside in his fever-madness.

He had no clear memory of anything that had happened during the last few days, nor of how he had come to that place where we found him. He had only stumbled and crawled on and on through the forest, driven by the will to keep going until he should fall dead.

In spite of what he had passed through, that stubborn will of his remained unbroken. Indeed, I think it was his will, rather than his drugs or our care, that put him on his feet again. When we had located many trees and bled them and started to make arrangements for carrying him on our return trip, he would not hear of it.

"When I become unable to walk or crawl, then you may carry me," he said. "Until then, I do my own traveling. Come on, let's go!"

SO WE started back with him staggering along behind us. Since we followed the route we had cut for ourselves on the way in, the return was not so hard, but it was hard enough, for now our food was gone and we had to live on what we could kill. As often happens when men are desperately in need of game, there was little game to be found. Yet we did get monkeys at times, and once we shot a tapir and had a great feast on him. When we could not get such animals as these we ate things which I will not tell you about because I do not like to remember them.

Yet, through all of this, John Clay kept

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coming on behind, falling now and then, but getting up again until he could get up no more; then we would take turns at carrying him. At night, when we could not march longer, he would take from a pocket a battered little mouth-organ, and on it he would play tunes with a hearty, rolling swing to them which would drive away our weariness and hunger and somehow give us strength.

It is wonderful, *senhores,* what a little music will do for men when they are in a hard place. We came to look forward to it during the day-time, in the long hours of marching, and the thought of it went far to help us on our way.

We had almost reached the end of our journey when Prudente was killed. He was leading and he tripped and fell. Before he could rise, a bushmaster struck him in the neck. He died very soon.

Since all of us now were weak and worn out, we had to leave him there until we could reach safety and send other men back to bury him. With his death I became the leader of our party, so I did not see much of John Clay during the day, for I was at the head of the line while he was struggling along in the rear. But, eager though we were to reach the journey's end, we never lost him.

There is nothing that knits men together so quickly and closely as enduring the same hardships. He was no longer merely a man whom we had found only a few days ago, but one of us. When he went down, the word went along the line, and we stopped until he could come on once more, for we could no longer carry him; we had all we could do to carry ourselves. Always he managed to rise, and then, with that haggard smile, he would tell us to go on and get out from underfoot so that he could walk without trampling on us. Then the line would move on.

At last it ended. We reached a *tambo* where our mates were working several *estradas* and, after telling them about Prudente, we tumbled into hammocks and for days we did nothing but rest and eat. It was during these days that John Clay became Clay John. He was sick for a time, but it was only the sickness of exhaustion and starvation, such as the rest of us had too; food and rest soon braced him up.

After he began to move around again, he gathered up a big double handful of clay one morning and sat down beside the *tambo* and began working with it. We watched him lazily and saw that he was shaping it with his fingers—long, slender fingers they were, and very deft in fashioning the clay.

Before our eyes, that lump of dirt grew into a man's head and shoulders. Then he took a little stick and worked on the face, looking at me now and then with a little smile. I laughed, because it seemed funny to see a grown man making himself a clay doll with which to play.

Finally he dropped the little stick, wiped his hands on his ragged breeches, and squinted very sharply at the thing he had done. The he turned it around so that we could see the face.

"*Por amor de Dios!*" said one of my mates. "Lourenço, it is you!"

Yes, *senhores,* it was my face. There was no doubt about it, it looked almost as much like me as I do myself. The clay was a reddish brown, so the face seemed to have real blood in it, and he had made it look so much like a little man that it took away my breath. We all rolled out of our hammocks and looked at it, exclaimed over it and laughed and shouted so that the other men working near by came running to see what was the matter. Then they laughed also, and there was much talk, and every man wanted him to make some clay heads of them, too. He said he would, but that first he would make the faces of us who had been with him in the jungle, and the others must wait their turn.

I KNOW, close by this *tambo* was a tree in which one of those *João de Barro* birds had his little clay house, and we had noticed the bird flying about while we lay and rested. One of the men glanced up at this nest and he pointed to it and then to John Clay and said—

"*João de Barro.*"

We all laughed louder than ever and explained the joke to John, who did not know the bird and was puzzled. When he understood he turned and bowed to the bird's nest, and said:

"Greetings, little brother! You are a better workman than I am, for you can build a whole house of clay while all I can do is to make faces."

From that time on we called him Clay John, or simply *João.*

That little bird up in the tree made some

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trouble for me, too. We set my clay head in the sun to bake and went to our hammocks, where we lay and smoked. By and by one of the men began to laugh, and I looked.

Senhores, that saucy little bird had seen the clay and had flown down to it and was pecking at it. I bounced out of my hammock, full of rage, for no wretched bird was going to spoil my face if I knew it, even though it was only a clay face. The bird flew off, of course, and I built a little fence to keep him away after that, while the other man lay and howled with laughter. And John said:

"Lourenço, you are learning something that many men have learned before you—that it is a great deal of trouble to have two faces!"

I did not know just what he meant, but I knew it was a joke, so I grinned and said nothing.

He made several more heads for the other men in the next few days, and then I told him to come with me to headquarters, where I must report concerning the new rubber country. We took a canoe and paddled down to the *coronel's* place, and there I told the old gentleman all about it. He received John with his usual courtesy toward newcomers, as well as with sympathy for his terrible experience.

I noticed that John, though his clothes hung in tatters and his hair was shaggy and his face overgrown with brown beard, stood straight and returned the *coronel's* greetings like one gentleman meeting another. After I finished my report, I went out and left those two together, while I attended to various affairs of my own.

The next time I saw John he looked every inch the gentleman. He was shaven clean, his hair had been barbered by the *coronel's* man servant, and he wore good clothing. As I have told you, he was not a big man, and the *coronel's* clothes fitted him as if they had been cut for him. Now, puffing lazily at a cigar, he looked so little like the wreck I had found in the jungle that when I spoke to him I called him "Senhor Clay." He laughed and answered:

"Not Senhor Clay, my friend, but *João de Barro*."

Then he told the *coronel* how we had changed his name, and the old gentleman was much amused.

I stayed there at headquarters for several days, taking more rest and waiting for the *coronel* to examine the rubber samples and make his plans. He and John talked much about things in the big world outside which John seemed to know very well, but which interested me little. Then one morning the *coronel* told me had decided to work the new tract and to put me in charge of the men who would go there. He had sent for the men, he said, and while we waited for them I should see about the loading of boats with our supplies. I turned to go, but just then John stopped me.

"Wait a minute, Lourenço," he said. Then he turned to the *coronel* and went on: "My friend, you have been very kind to me and have shown me that true Brazilian hospitality of which I have heard. I thank you for it, sir, and I wish to ask another favor."

"My services are altogether at your disposal, *senhor*," answered the old gentleman.

John bowed and replied—

"Then will you give me a job?"

We stared at him, and the *coronel* said—

"Pardon me, *senhor*, I do not understand."

John threw back his head and laughed and then he explained—

"I mean will you hire me as a rubber-worker in this place where Lourenço is going?"

The *coronel* was so astounded that he sat there open-mouthed, while I lost my breath. We had supposed he would leave the country on the first boat he could get.

"But—but—*senhor*, that is impossible!" sputtered the *coronel*.

"Why?"

"Because—why, *senhor*, I could not have an American gentleman working for me as a common *seringueiro*! And there is nothing else you could do out there. You understand, *senhor*, that I shall be greatly pleased to have you remain with me as a guest and I wish you to remain a long time, for it is lonely here and I greatly appreciate your companionship. But as a workman? Impossible! Why do you ask this?"

John answered bluntly—

"Because I have no money."

The *coronel* looked pained and said—"*Senhor*, you should know that I will gladly lend you any sum——"

"I do know it, my friend," John interrupted, "but I have certain prejudices, and

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among them is a prejudice against borrowing money when there is any way of earning it. I am not one of those persons who think it disgraceful to earn an honest living by manual labor. Also, I like your men; they are brave, generous, stout-hearted, two-fisted *men*, and I shall feel honored to work among them. Furthermore, a knowledge of rubber may be useful to me when I return to the States, for I am not rich and when I go back I shall have to do something in business. So, *coronel*, give me a *machete* and some overalls, have somebody mend my old shirt, and put me to work."

The *coronel* still objected, but John persisted, always with that little smile of his. Finally the *coronel* sighed.

"Ah, you Americans! Have you no fear of death, even when you have once passed through its horrors? I will leave the decision to Lourenço, who is in charge of the expedition.

"Lourenço, will you take this man as a *seringueiro?*"

He shook his head a little at me, meaning that I should say no, but I answered instantly:

"Gladly, *coronel*, for what he has said about us men is true also of himself, and I do not know of any man I would rather have with me in hard country."

So the *coronel* had to give in. He turned to John and spoke as if he were already a workman.

"Then, *João de Barro*, you shall be one of Lourenço's gang. You will go with him into the southern forest and you will be at all times subject to his commands. You will cut the trees, smoke the rubber and do whatever else he directs you to do, without question or argument. You will take the risk of death by fever, or beriberi, or snakes, or animals, or Indians, or any other thing you will meet. In return for your work you will be paid at the rate of ten American gold dollars a day." Then he smiled and added, "And when you are ready, *senhor*, come back and be my guest again."

John gave him a snappy military salute and answered: "Very good, sir. There are just two things more I will ask you to get for me—a new harmonica and cartridges for my gun."

The *coronel* promised to do this, though he might have to send to Iquitos for the mouth-organ. He did not laugh at the request, either, for I had told him how much John's music had meant to us on that hard march home, and he appreciated its value.

SO JOHN took off the *coronel's* clothes, put on his bush outfit, and went to work helping me load the boats. The other men came in during the day, and the next morning we rowed away up the river. There were twelve of us, and we carried full supplies for four weeks, with the knowledge that other necessities would follow us to a place where we could get them as needed. When we reached the outermost workings we made up our packs and plunged into the jungle.

On that march to the new district Clay John stood up under his load as well as any of us, though he carried the same weight as the rest, and it was no light burden. At the rubber forest he went to work in a way that showed he meant to earn his wages.

We showed him how to tap the trees and collect the milk in the little cups, and how to smoke it at the *defumador*, and how to roll out the moisture afterward; soon he was a full-fledged *seringueiro* and worked a couple of *estradas* of his own.

Always he had a cheery word and a laugh for the rest of us, and always his old mouth-organ came out at night and played for us until we came to know many of the tunes by heart and hummed them at our work. Always, too, he addressed me as "chief" when others were about, though if we were alone he called me Lourenço, for he believed men should show respect for their leader, since better discipline could thus be maintained among them and the work of all would go faster—and he was right. The others followed his example without thinking about it, and I had very little trouble.

As I have said, he worked hard and steadily, yet he found time to make more clay heads to please the men, who thought a great deal of them. And once, when I came alone down his *estrada*, I asked him how he learned to do that work in clay. He said he had always been fond of it, that he had even studied in Europe and that if he had the time and tools he could take a block of stone and cut it into heads and faces and figures of men and women.

Yet he said he had never made his living by it because it did not pay well unless a man had a great name, and that before he

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could make a great name he would be likely to starve to death. He said, too, that he did not care about doing that work for money, but he would like to have money enough to let him toil on a piece of stone for a year or two and make something so good that it would endure and bring pleasure to thousands long after he was dead. But, he added, there was no chance of that.

As the days went by, we loaded ourselves with rubber and went back through the bush to get new food. At the *tambo* where our supplies awaited us we found also the cartridges and the mouth-organ which the *coronel* had promised John. It was a fine big mouth-organ, much better than the the little one he had carried, and it had a double row of holes and deep, rolling notes that made one think of a church.

When he took it and began to play on it, swaying his head and shoulders in time to the swing of the music, the men all came around him and stood very quiet, listening. He played the tunes we had heard before and others that were new to us; at the last he played a thing that seemed to tug at our hearts, though we did not know why, and I saw that his eyes were far away and his face seemed sad. Then he put away the organ, and the men drifted back to their work.

When I asked him what was that last thing that he had played, he said it was an old song called "Home, Sweet Home." Then I understood why he had looked sad. But when I asked him, "Are you going out, John?" he smiled again, and said, "Not yet, chief," and went to making up his pack.

So he went back with us and worked on as before. Not long after that came a day that none of us will forget.

IT WAS a very hot day, with no air stirring, and we went about our work slowly and heavily. At noon we were lying around the *tambo*, smoking and dozing, when John got out his mouth-organ and began to play. After a minute or two he rose and walked up and down a couple of times. I noticed that his music was different from usual, and that there was a monotonous, regular throb in it like a man beating a drum. Soon he walked away from us and went all around the *tambo*, going slowly as if only moving with the music, and playing all the time. When he came back he took the instrument from his mouth and stood looking at it as if something were wrong with it. Quietly he said:

"Men, do not spring up or seize your rifles. Lie still and let me see what I can do. We are surrounded by Indians."

Then he went to playing again while we lay there with chills beginning to crawl up our backs. Our guns were almost within arm's length of us, but we knew that if we were surrounded by *barbaros* we should be shot full of darts and arrows the instant we sprang up, and the slightest scratch from those poisoned tips means death.

"Steady, men!" I said, and went on smoking while I watched the bush; soon I could pick out the heads of some of the savages standing behind trees and peering out to watch John and listening to his music.

At last, just as I felt that I could not stay quiet a second longer, John stopped, looked straight at the savage nearest him, smiled and beckoned to him.

The man hesitated and then slowly came out. Still smiling, John made motions to tell him we were friends and would like to have him eat with us. Then he gave him a piece of roasted monkey we had left from our meal. The wild man looked suspiciously at it, and then grabbed it, sank his sharp-filed teeth into it and grunted with pleasure. At that the bush rustled all around us as the other Indians came out to join the first.

There were about twenty of them, all powerful and ugly-looking and armed with bows and blow-guns. They watched us like snakes while we moved to get more food for them, ready to kill us if we grabbed our rifles, but we took good care to avoid this and got a meal for them as soon as we could. Then John began to play again, walking up and down as before. Between his music and our food and friendliness, the savages lost their hostile manner. They ate a huge meal and made a sad hole in our supplies, but you may be sure we did not begrudge it.

Then, when their bellies were full and they felt good-natured, we explained to them as well as we could that we were not there to destroy their woods or drive away the game, but that all we wanted was the rubber-milk, which was not useful to them.

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They nodded, and their leader let us understand that we could have the rubber, as long as we did not come to their village and molest their women. After that we took them around and showed them what we were doing, and they were much interested in everything and satisfied that we would do no harm if let alone. And so, through John's cool head, what would have been a deadly fight was turned into a harmless visit.

When we came back to the *tambo* the Indians wanted more music, and John played for them until his mouth was sore. Then they got up to go. First, though, they wanted to look over our belongings in the hut, and of course we let them do so.

Up under the roof, where we had hung them with vines to keep them from injury, the *barbaros* saw the little clay heads of us that John had made. They grunted in astonishment, and one of them touched my clay head with his blow-gun. Fearing he would knock it down and break it, I took it down myself and held it so they could see that it was my own face. They grunted again, talked among themselves, picked out each man's face among us as we stood there and pointed out each one's little head hanging from the roof.

We explained that Clay John had done all this, going through the motions of a man picking up a piece of clay from the ground and shaping it with his hands. They looked at him as if they thought him a very great man. Then their leader said something, and two of them went out into the jungle. Before long they came back, bringing with them some wet clay. The leader took this and showed John he wanted a head like ours made of him. John nodded and sat down in the shade and went to work.

Now this clay looked like any clay, but it was oddly shaped. The savages had brought it in just as they found it, and it was in four round, smooth balls which looked as if they had been rolled along by water. John picked up one of these balls and set it on the ground before him, then reached for another. Before he touched it, however, his hand stopped, and he looked in a puzzled way at the first ball. Then he picked it up again, weighed it in his hand and looked it all over. After that he lifted the other balls in turn.

"This clay is too heavy," he said. "There must be something in it."

He dug one of the balls apart. There was something in it. There was a sort of core at the center of it, about as big as the ball of the thumb, and it seemed heavy. John looked sharply at it, and suddenly he turned very pale and seemed to stiffen all over. But he said nothing, and after a minute he dropped the thing he had found into a pocket and dug the others apart too. Each had the same kind of core in it, and each core went into his pocket. When he had cleaned them out he put all the clay together and started making the head for the chief.

The Indians all crowded around behind him—except the chief, who squatted in front of him—and watched every motion like a lot of children looking at something new. When the head took shape and he began on the face they talked and grinned in great excitement, and the chief himself wriggled around and finally hopped up and came around to see what it looked like. But John made him go back and squat again and stay there until the work was done. When the head was finished it was as good as any of ours, and the chief was very proud of it.

THEN John asked him in sign-language where this clay had been obtained. The chief spoke to the men who had brought it, and they pointed, and John told them he would go with them to that place. So all the *barbaros* turned and went away together, and he went too. We listened anxiously, half-fearing to hear his revolver break out into sudden shooting, but nothing of the kind happened.

He was gone for some time and then he came back alone. His face was red and he was laughing and singing as if he had drunk too much *cachassa*, and we wondered what he had been doing out there. He soon showed us. He turned out a pocket and dumped into his hand something which he held for us to see. *Senhores*, it was gold!

The gold was in small grains and it was wet, and, as he stirred it with a finger, we could see a little clay mixed in with it.

Then he told us that this was what made the cores of the clay balls the Indians had brought in. He had seen that it was gold when he dug it out, but thought it best to say nothing about it then. And now the savages had shown him the stream where they had found it, and there were many

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more clay balls like the first. He had opened some, and every one had a core of gold!

"Come and see it, chief," he said.

I went with him, and after we passed through some rough jungle we reached the stream. It was off to one side of where we had been working, and it was only a little creek now because it was the dry season, but we could see that when the flood came it would be a powerful torrent until the water rose so high as to swallow it altogether. In it, just as he said, were many more of those round, smooth chunks of clay which had been washed down from some unknown place in the times of high water. How far they had come no man could say, and we did not care—it was enough that they were there.

"Now you can go home, João," I said, "and work as much as you please on stone heads and have everything you desire."

"Yes," he said, and stood looking at the water.

Presently he took out his mouth-organ and very softly and sweetly he played that tune I had heard only once before—the song of home. Then we turned and went back to the *tambo*.

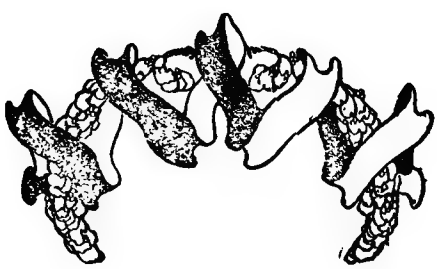
OF COURSE that was the end of *João de Barro*, the *seringueiro*. The next day he took a man with him and went out to headquarters to see the *coronel*. The rest of us went on with our own work.

After a time he came back, bringing more men and tools, and they built a *tambo* of their own by the creek of clay and worked up along it until the rainy season set in again and the flooding water drove us all out of the jungle together. By that time he and his men had taken out much gold, so that he was a very wealthy man. But he remained the same old John, and when we had reached the headquarters he used to play for us at night, just as he always had while we were back in the bush.

At last there came a boat, and when it went he went with it, standing in the stern and waving to us until he went out of sight around a bend. We cheered him and waved our hats and fired our guns in farewell to the man whom we had found a raving wreck and were sending away a millionaire. After he was gone we missed him much and hoped he might come back in the next dry season to get more gold. But he never came again.

Now, no doubt, he is a fine gentleman in your country, with all the splendid things that wealth can buy. Yet I like to remember him as he was—a *seringueiro*, standing there beside me on the bank of that little creek deep in the jungle, with the home-light in his eyes and the home-song in his heart. For that, *senhores*, is all that brings us rubber-workers into this deadly region of fever and famine and flood —the thought of home.

If we have homes, then we have others to care for who are not so strong as we, and we come to get money and make life easier for them. If we have no homes, then deep in our minds is the dream that one day we may have them, with good women and little ones, and that through our present toil and danger those homes will be made comfortable and happy for them. It is in every man's soul, I believe, that home-hunger, and whether we win through at last to fortune like Clay John, or fall into the jaws of death like Prudente da Gama, it does not die until the man dies also.



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Where Nothing Ever Happened

by W A Macdonald

JUST before the famous ball of the season, Taylor came to Shoreham Bay with a double purpose—a vacation from his violent profession in the unfamiliar atmosphere of a fashionable watering-place; and curiosity concerning rumors of the whereabouts of a man—a man wanted for murder, for robbing a bank, for stealing jewels from a woman and for five other crimes against the laws of three States. Taylor, who was rich in curious sources of unusual information, had had whispered to him two names—"Bulwer" and "Shoreham Bay." The first was that of the man who was wanted.

When Taylor arrived at Shoreham Bay it was as a friend of the Richmonds. This meant social distinction. Almost at once he became acquainted with Mr. Cairns, a heavily built, deeply bronzed and excessively determined-looking man who swam much in the warm sea-water and who amused himself with a little motor-boat when swimming bored him.

Soon afterward Taylor became acquainted with Miss Penelope Bevard. Miss Bevard was young, roundly slender, alternately dreaming and animated; and she swam often with Mr. Cairns who, though new to the beach, had arrived with excellent social vouchers. She had promised to sail with him in his motor-boat that evening for a few minutes before the ball, with Mrs. Hamilton as chaperon. Through some whim, she did not care to go too early.

Taylor found both the social atmosphere and the savor of the sea very restful after having vigorously applied his peculiar talents in the service of the Government for the duration of the war; this combination vacation and possibility of pursuit offered an easy transition to his private work. In that quiet, good-humored way that made people like him, he was enjoying himself immensely on the beach.

"Why is that schooner anchored out there?" asked Miss Bevard, who, with some naïveté, had been discussing the jewels to be worn that night at the ball. "It has been there all day."

"Probably fishing," commented Cairns.

Taylor stretched his legs in the warm sand and stood up.

"Let's swim out and see," he suggested quietly.

"No!" said Cairns, sitting up sharply on the sand. Then he laughed nervously. "I don't know about you, but it's too far for me."

Taylor's eyes narrowed for a flash to chilled-steel gray, but his voice was soft and easy.

"Will you go, Miss Bevard?"

"Oh, I don't believe I could make it," she laughed. "I surely wouldn't be able to swim back. Could you really do it, Mr. Taylor?"

She glanced at his muscular slenderness, something of the tiger under the smooth skin rippling as he swung his arms. He stood there in his red bathing-suit smiling at her so that the humorous lines crinkled in the brown skin at the corners of his eyes.

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"You compel me to go alone; you both desert me," he said. "Suppose I find it to be a pirate ship, Miss Bevard, instead of a mere fisherman or yachtsman. Suppose——"

"Not a bit of chance," laughed the girl. "If there were I would go with you even if I never came back. Nothing ever happens here; it's the dullest place. If it were not for you and Mr. Cairns I would make mother and father take me home.

Taylor made her a little bow.

"I wouldn't swim out there, Taylor, if I were you," said Cairns, getting to his feet. He was a bulky, powerful man, bigger than Taylor by half a head in height, by thirty pounds or more in weight. Taylor was smiling still, the lines etched deeply at the corners of his eyes.

"I guess I won't," he agreed softly. Suddenly and queerly the watching girl realized that in a contest this was much the more dangerous of the two men, and without reason a little thrill of excitement ran through her.

"Let's have just a little swim then," she cried, and turned and ran down the smooth white beach, the two men after her.

EXCEPT Miss Penelope Bevard and Mr. Charles Cairns everybody of the least consequence who was young enough to dance and many who were too old was present at the ball of the season at the Hotel Fontaine, and the absent pair were already later than their scheduled motor-boat spin had promised to make them.

Taylor thought, as he stood there with his friend Richmond, whose handsome white head he had first seen under adventurous circumstances in widely different surroundings from these, that he had never seen more glowing beauty, more lavish display of jewels. He saw pearls, diamonds and tiaras that once would have ransomed kings from captivity.

He knew what these people would think if they were told who and what he was. Some would be shocked at having met on equal footing a man who had created the profession of legalized gunman, who dealt for a living, by violent means if necessary, with criminals whom the ordinary forces of the law had failed to ensnare. Others would be inclined to feel their jeweled possessions safer for his presence.

In the history of this tanned and unassuming man who stood there in the self-possession of correct evening clothes, lay innumerable unsuspected adventures—the fight in the bank where he had replaced the cashier, the little war he had conducted from machine gun to ether-cone all by himself, the capture of the murderous canoist at the river bridge, the adventure with blowpipe and poisoned dart aboard the train.

A woman screamed at the door. The room went dark. There was a high, harsh voice peremptory with menace of death, and there were moans as women fainted. Out of the dark came movements of violence, the sound of epithets and attempted blows as men sought fiercely but blindly to protect women.

The light came on bewilderingly. At the doorway two men, masked in black from forehead to chin, commanded the room with automatic pistols. One stepped forward with cool haste, seized a jewel missed in the first descent, and rapidly, here and there, plucked others. A threatening growl burst from the man remaining at the door, and a woman's escort subsided in the face of a black circlet of steel. The room was engulfed in darkness again, but in the brief time that the lights had flashed up Richmond had noticed that Taylor had gone. Where a window stood open the screen was up.

IN THE starlight a dark figure moved rapidly across the ghostly sand of the deserted beach, stooped and was motionless except for the suggested action of its hands, which were entirely in shadow. It straightened and went through vague movements of dispensing with clothing, then stooped and toiled again as if hiding with sand the garments taken off. It advanced swiftly to the water, which laved the shore warmly with little more than a ripple, a sort of rhythmic hush.

Above, the stars hung like silver lamps in an arching infinitude of purple. The figure waded without a single splash, waist deep, breast deep—then the liquid ease of the slightly swelling ocean took its weight and noiselessly a glistening arm struck out strongly for the open sea.

As Taylor swam with that ease which often belied the speed of his movements, he clearly pictured the laughing Bevard

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girl relaxing the tension of the incident of the morning by inviting him and Cairns to swim. He regretted the danger to which he knew he was submitting her tonight. He rolled to his left side and measured the distance to the lights of the harbor whence Cairns's motor-boat must come. Starting even in point of time, the swimmer, if he were a good one, had a chance to reach the schooner in the offing as quickly as Cairns could do it in his motor-boat.

Taylor increased his stoke. By his bulk and the set of head and shoulder, the second of the masked men had betrayed himself. The swimmer paused grimly on his smooth way through the quiet sea, floating for a minute while he readjusted the weight of the automatic he had taken precaution to conceal in the sand. He shifted the strap that held the heavy weapon in its water-proof holster and went on again.

Above him the riding light of the schooner scarcely undulated upon the peaceful sea. Voices of men talking on the deck came to him. He slid soundless into the shadow of the dark hull, a mere moving head upon the hidden waters. Like a part of the shadow of the ship he drew himself from the water by the bobstay and reached the deck. There he lay in security and concealment behind the curve of the deck-house. An intent watcher would scarcely have seen him when, after a little, he began to move imperceptibly toward the stern.

"It's time they showed up," boomed a voice astern. "If it goes wrong it will be because he would ring in that girl. Why did you send Cairns on that job?"

There was a long silence that seemed tense. It was broken by a voice so dry of sympathy with the questioner, so hard with perpetually controlled irritation, that it sounded brittle.

"Cairns was the only gentleman I had. You'll be asking next why I didn't go myself or why I didn't send you."

"I think they're coming," said the first man, suddenly muffling his resounding tone.

The drum of the motor boomed through the night as he spoke. On the opposite side of the deck-house the figure continued its stealthy progress toward the stern. The motor-boat shut off its engine in the dark. As Cairns swished alongside he spoke rapidly in his heavy bass:

"Here, take her quick. She's under ether."

"Where are the rocks?" boomed the other voice. "That's what we want. —— the girl."

But this time the hard dry tone of his superior lashed out of all control; murder sibilated through it.

"By ——, do as he says, Jones. Take her quick—quick! I'll argue with you later, you——"

The fourth man, companion of Cairns, stepped aboard without a word. He had done his talking to a purpose, through a black silk mask in the ball room of the Hotel Fontaine.

"Take her below, Jones, and put her in the captain's cabin and get back on deck quick," said the leader. "We've got to sink this motor-boat."

Jones, sullen and weighted with his limp burden, moved cautiously down the narrow companionway, but he came on deck again with something of eagerness.

"Now, Cairns," commanded the leader in his brittle voice.

"We got a good haul," said Cairns. "The Whelpely diamonds as well as what we expected. Look it over."

"No!" exclaimed the other. "No light. We'll see them below. One flaw spoils everything. Do you think I became a yachtsman and made myself sick working and cruising up and down this coast just to have it end in a chase instead of an easy, quiet getaway? Nobody will ever suspect an innocent schooner, especially if it doesn't break out in a sudden light at night. How about your own getaway?"

"Perfect," growled Cairns. "We got the lay of the land, doused the lights, grabbed the stuff, turned on the lights for a flash to blind 'em and finish the job, doused them again and got out. Then we canned the masks and walked quietly down the street to the wharf as if nothing had happened.

"We were even able to keep ahead of the excitement, though it was probably not far behind. The girl was waiting in the boat. I had promised to go get her chaperon while she went to the wharf. While I was gone Red and I were doing the job at the hotel. When we got to the boat I introduced Red and said the chaperon was coming in a minute and there was just time to start the engine and see if it was running all right. Red cast off quietly and quickly.

"All this time, you see, there are people on the wharf and we have to keep ourselves a

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part of the social landscape, smiling and talking. See what a layout that made? No suspicion aroused there as to escaping persons. Just a nice picture of the respectable element of society going out for a little spin all in good humor. See it, chief? Well, as soon as we got past the point where nobody could see, expecially as it was pretty dark, we put her to sleep with chloroform and then changed to ether so as not to hurt her."

"That's a good layout," interrupted the dry, imperious voice of the chief. "Now we'll sink the motor-boat and that completes it. It leaves the picture like this: Cairns, a Summer guest and Miss What's-Her-Name seen going for a quiet sail. They don't come back. Boat found sunk, wreckage washed ashore, but no bodies—no storm. That makes it hard to explain the wreck."

"Don't sink the motor-boat," suggested Cairns. "Just cast her adrift."

"That's better—empty boat found drifting; contains girl's handkerchief, Cairns's cap, Red's cap, length of rope thrown over the side, life-preserver gone. Girl must have fallen overboard. The two men then threw out a rope and the life-preserver and jumped in after her. There was a struggle in the water and they all went down.

"Now, off goes the motor-boat. One passing boat spotting her tied up here ruins everything."

They worked quickly. The smaller craft, prepared with circumstantial lies, rope over the side and life-preserver adrift, was shoved off and slowly floated into the dark.

"Now," said the chief, "let's go below and see the stuff."

There was an expectant shuffling of interest.

"Jones, you stay on deck and keep a sharp lookout."

"Aw, can that stuff, chief," complained Jones. "I want to see the rocks. There's nothing to keep a lookout for if Cairns did as well as he says."

But he stayed on deck.

A MATCH scratched below and the yellow light of the cabin lamp flooded the standing-room. Jones stepped out of the light into the shadow beside the deck-house the better to see out upon the water.

He never went below.

Out of the dark a hand caught him at a certain place in the throat, reaching from behind as he stood there peering at the sea—a steel hand that permitted him one gulp instead of a cry, and that relentlessly and silently throttled him into insensibility. Silently Taylor laid the body of Jones beside the deck-house.

Then he crept aft with sinister stealth. He could just see the cabin lamp and the men beneath it. Over the broad back of Cairns, who sat nearest the companionway, he could see the glitter and flash of jewels spread upon the table. Beyond, at the right, in the comparative darkness of the captain's cabin, he could discern the motionless figure of the girl. On the port side through another cabin was the way to the galley, whence, it was easy to figure, the forecastle hatch which he had passed on his way astern led up to the deck. It would not do to give any one time to get through that way, a menace to the rear.

Between the cabins on the mahogany paneling, low enough to be seen by a man at the wheel, was the ship's clock. Something about it was wrong or different. The figures on the dial were not black; they were whitish-yellow.

"A radium dial!" said Taylor to himself sharply. His plan was complete.

Taylor knew the face of the man whose back was to that clock. It was John Bulwer, he of the murder record and the hard, dry voice. He was as quick with a gun as were the men of the West that has passed. He was as desperate as a man who knows that on freedom depends his life. His quick eyes glanced up and saw Taylor who, automatic in hand, had moved full into the light.

Like a flash Bulwer fell backward out of his chair, his hand reaching hipward. Taylor, swinging the muzzle of his pistol, accurately shot out the lamp and with the positions of the men in the cabin photographed in his mind fell bodily down the companionway on the bulky figure of Cairns, who was in the act of turning when the heavy butt of the .45 dropped him like a bullock.

As the glowing figures on the dial of the ship's clock were suddenly blotted out, two red flashes sprang to meet each other and a huge double explosion shook the confines of the cabin. There was a cry, a distorted semblance of that dry, hard voice,

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and the crash of a body, then the thud of a blow as Taylor found the third man, and a strangled cry, then silence—except for the stertorous breathing of the girl in the inner cabin.

A match flared up and went out. Its brief blur of light disclosed the crouched figure of a man in a swimming-suit who held in the crook of his arm the limp form of another man. The hand that held the match, evidently filched from the limp figure's pocket and flicked into flame with a thumb-nail, held also a heavy automatic. The third figure was huddled on the floor beneath the ship's clock. The hands of the clock and the numerals glowed in the intensified darkness as the match went out. For a second Bulwer had stood before them, then collapsed with a shudder—dead.

AGAIN there was a lighted lamp. Taylor had found an undamaged one in the boatswain's locker. By its light he watched the girl essay an unsteady walk across the cabin. She had almost recovered from the sickness of the anesthetic. Cairns had vaguely come to; he and the two who had been choked were securely bound.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" asked Miss Penelope Bevard, her voice not too steady. Something in Taylor's face vanished as she looked at him, but not before it had recalled her thrill of the morning and had explained the impression of the tiger in the man. She sat down, understanding beginning to dawn in her oval face, into which strove a returning fleck of color. As Taylor smiled at her the look that had startled her gave way to the good-natured lines that crinkled about his eyes.

"Everything is done," he said, "until you feel able to go ashore in a small boat; but I am afraid the ball has broken up."

"Mr. Taylor!" she said with a rush of exclamatory breath. "I know who you are. I remember hearing Mr. Richmond talk about you years ago to my father. How stupid I was not to realize before——"

She drew a long breath of excitement.

"I'll never say again that nothing ever happens."

"It does; we are going to have a swim in the morning," said Taylor.

MAN TO MAN

A Four-Part Story - Conclusion

By Jackson Gregory

Author of "Silver Slippers," "The Bells of San Juan," etc.

XX

NO FAR-SIGHTED, inspired prophet's services were needed to predict a rather stormy scene upon the arrival of old Hell-Fire Packard and Miss Terry Temple at the place of the storekeeper of Red Creek. It was to be expected that Steve Packard would be on hand; that he would be impatiently awaiting the drum of a racing motor; that he would be on the sidewalk to greet Temple's daughter.

"Terry!" he called. "So soon?"

He couldn't have made a worse beginning had he pondered the matter long and

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diabolically. Blenham had been right and Steve had had ample time to admit the fact utterly and completely; now there was a ringing note in his voice, a new eagerness which, falling upon his grandfather's ears, might be likened with no great stretch of imagination to a spark in a keg of gun-powder.

The old man's brakes, applied emphatically, brought his car to a standstill.

"Look at that clock!" was his first remark, at once apprising Steve of his relative's presence and hinting, by means of its no uncertain tone, at an unpleasant situation on hand or about to burst upon them. "Made it in fifty-three minutes, did you? Well, I done it in less'n forty-nine! What have you got to say about that?"

But Terry ignored him and jumped down, her hand impulsively laid on Steve's arm. Thus she, in her turn, may be said to have added another spark to young Packard's on the powder-keg.

"How's dad?" she asked quickly.

Steve patted the hand on his arm and either Terry did not notice the act or did not mind. Old man Packard both noted and minded. His grunt was to be heard above Dr. Bridges' devout "Thank God, we're here!" as the physician stepped stiffly to the sidewalk.

"Better," said Steve. "I think he's going to be all right after all. I hope so. He——"

"Blenham?" she asked insistently. "He didn't put one over on you? The mortgage——"

Steve tapped his breast pocket.

"The papers have been signed; we got a notary; everything is shipshape. Go in; I'll tell you all about it later."

He turned toward the car and the stiffened figure of the man gripping the wheel with tense, hard hands.

"Grandy——"

"Grandy, your foot!" boomed old Packard suddenly, one hand jerked away to be clenched into a lifted fist. "An' Terry! My ——!"

"What do you mean?" asked Steve. "I don't understand."

"I mean," shouted Packard senior, his voice shaking with emotion, "that no mouth in the world is big enough to hold them two words the same night! If you want to chum with any Temple livin', he-Temple or she-Temple, if, sir, you intend to go round slobberin' over the low-down enemies of your own father an' father's father, why, sir, then I'm Mr. Packard to you and the likes of you!"

Still was Steve mystified.

"I thought," he muttered, "that since you two came together, since you yourself have driven her in——"

"If I, sir," thundered his grandfather, "have chosen to bring that petticoated wildcat there an' that ol' pill-slinger from my place to Red Creek in a shake less'n forty-nine minutes—jus' to show her that anything on God's earth done by a Temple can be better done by a Packard—you got to go to thinkin' things, have you? Why, sir, so help me, sir, I've a notion to jump down right now an' give you the horse-whippin' of your life!"

Steve, in spite of himself, chuckled. Terry, reassured about her father, giggled. Both sounds were audible; the two, mingled, were entirely too much to be borne.

"You—you disgrace to an honorable name," the old man called bitterly and wrathfully. "You——"

He broke off, hesitated, glared from Steve at the car's side to Terry already on the steps of the store, and concluded something more quietly though not a whit less furiously for all that: "You speak of papers signed. You don't mean you're actually havin' any kind of business dealin's, frien'ly dealin's, with the Temples?"

"Blenham brought word you were foreclosing on Temple; he had some sort of a crooked scheme to cheat Temple out of his land. I have just framed a deal whereby I put up the money to pay you your mortgage and——"

"You? You, Stephen Packard?"

"Yes," said Steve, wondering whether the old man were the more moved because of the shock of finding his nephew able to pay off so large a sum or because of the "frien'ly dealin's with the Temples."

There was a brief silence. Doctor Bridges mounted the steps; he and Terry were going in. Then again Hell-Fire Packard's voice burst out violently and Terry stopped short, her hands going suddenly to her breast. Her face, could they have noted in the pale light, was flaming scarlet.

"That hussy, that jade, that Jezebel!" came the ringing denunciation. "The trickly, shameless, penurious, graspin' unprincipled little she-devil! She's after you, my boy, after you hard. An', you bet

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miserable blind worm of a fool, you ain't got the sense to see it! Everybody knows it; the whole country's talkin' about it; how Temple's baitin' his trap with her an' she's baitin' her trap with herself an'——"

"Grandfather!" cried Steve, his own face flushing under the scathing torrent. "You don't know what you are saying!"

"I know what he's saying."

Terry, her hands still tight-pressed to her breast, came slowly down the steps. Though but a moment had passed her face was now dead white in the moonlight.

"You are saying," and her eyes shone straight up into the old man's, "that I am setting a trap for your grandson? That I, Teresa Arriega Temple, would for an instant consider a Packard, the son and the grandson of a Packard, as worthy of shining my boots for me? Why, I spit upon the two of you!"

She whirled and was gone into the house. Steve, instead of watching her going, kept his eyes hard upon his grandfather's face. Now that the door closed he said quietly:

"Grandfather, we have seen rather little of each other. I think we had better see even less from now on. You have insulted that girl in a way that makes me want to climb into your car and drag you down—and beat you half to death!"

His restraint was melting under the fire of his passion; his voice grew less quiet and began to tremble.

"I am going to make that girl the next Mrs. Packard or know the reason why!"

"Defy me, do you? Defy me an' go an' run with a pack of thieves an'——"

"That's enough!" shouted Steve. "I am going right straight and ask her——"

"Ask her an' —— swallow you!" came the vociferous permission from the enfuriated old man. "But remember one thing: Blenham has slipped up tonight, maybe, an' let you an' her an' her lyin', thievin', scoundrelly father steal a march on me. But it's the last one; mark that! Blenham gets his orders straight from me tonight; he goes after you to break you, smash you, literally pull you to pieces root an' branch—an' with me an' Blenham workin' on the job night an' day, stoppin' at nothin'. Hear me? I mean it!" His two fists were now lifted high above his head. "Stoppin' at nothin' I'll step on you an' the rest of your —— Temple frien's like you was a nest of caterpillars. You hear me, Stephen!"

But Stephen, his lips tight pressed as he fought with himself to keep his hands off of his own father's father, turned and went the way Terry had gone.

"You hear me, Stephen. There's nothin' I'll stop at to smash you!"

SO HIS grandfather's voice followed him mightily. But young Packard had already set his thought upon another matter. Before him in the tiny living-room of the ramshackle store building a kerosene lamp was burning palely, and lying upon an old sofa, face down, shaken with sobs, was Terry.

"Terry!" he called softly. "Your father isn't——"

He thought that she had not heard. He came closer and laid his hand gently—there was a deep tenderness even in the action—upon her shoulder. But Terry had heard and now flung his hand violently aside and sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing angrily into his.

"My father is asleep. Dr. Bridges rather thinks there is nothing very much the matter with him," she remarked crisply. "I am sorry I troubled you in any way, Mr. Packard. You say you arranged matters with dad? Well, I want you to tear up the papers; I'll see that your money is returned to you."

"Terry!" he muttered.

Then she flared out hotly, her two small hands clenched at her sides, her chin lifted, her voice a new voice in his ears, bitter and hostile.

"Don't you Terry me, Steve Packard! Now or ever again. I am sorry that I ever saw you; I am ashamed that I ever spoke to you. I had rather be dead or—yes, I'd rather be in Blenham's arms than have you look at me!"

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Steve, utterly at sea. "I don't understand."

"You don't have to," snapped Terry. "All you've got to know is that I won't have anything further in any way whatever to do with you. I won't have you helping us with our mortgage; I won't have you advancing money to us; I won't stand one little minute for any of your—your wretched interference with our affairs! If you think you can—can butt in on our side of any fight in the world——"

She ended abruptly, beginning to flounder, panting so that the swift rise and fall of her breast was an outward token of inward

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emotion. Steve Packard stared and flushed hotly and began to feel his own anger mount quickly.

"Butt in on your affairs!" he snorted after a fashion more than vaguely reminiscent of his grandfather. "I like that! As if I'd have come a step without your invitation."

And so he blurted out the one thing he should have left unsaid, the thing which already rankled in Terry's proud heart; she had asked him to come; she had in a way suggested a—a sort of partnership.

"Oh! how I hate you!" cried Terry. "You—you Packard!"

"If there's some crime, some string of crimes that I have committed——"

"Will you tear up those papers? I'll get you back your money. Will you tear up those papers?"

"Will you explain what's gone wrong?"

"I will not."

He shrugged exasperatingly.

"I'll keep the papers," he returned stonily. "I put over rather a good deal tonight, come to think of it."

He put on his hat, jamming it down tight, and half turned to go.

"When you want to talk ranch matters over with me—come to my ranch-house, little pardner!"

"Oh!" cried Terry. "Oh!"

XXI

Each man's life is what he shapes it for himself.

"A STUPID, bare-faced, platitudinous lie!"

Steve Packard, unusually irritable here of late, flung the offending book through an open window and into the night without and got to his feet.

"A man's life is what the evil little gods of chance make it, curse them. Or what a fool of a girl tangles and twists it into."

He shook himself viciously and went to his door, staring out across the hills vaguely molded under the stars.

Life was just a very unstasifactory sort of a proposition. It was a game that wasn't worth the players' serious attention, a game all of chance and not in the least of skill, and not even interesting! So, in the somber depths of his soul, Steve Packard admitted freely. And, until a certain night only some six months ago, he had never divined this great truth.

That night Blenham had sneered, "Stuck on her yourself, are you?" and Steve had recognized a vital fact inelegantly expressed; that night Terry Temple had appeared to him more than just a "good little sport"; that night he had somewhat bruskly considered the sweet femininity of her under her assumed surface of *diablerie* and had found her infinitely desirable; that same night Terry, for no reason in the world that Steve Packard could discover, had suddenly congealed into a thing of ice that had never since thawed save only briefly before burning fits of wrath.

Two hours after he had admitted to himself that he loved her she informed him with all of the emphasis she could summon for the occasion that she hated him. And life hadn't been what he had made it at all.

The papers which Temple had signed were still in existence, safely deposited in a bank in San Juan. Steve had paid off the Temple mortgage to his grandfather; he had paid Temple a thousand dollars in cash; thereby he had acquired a half interest in the Temple ranch. That had all been quite in accordance with Terry's suggestions and entirely satisfactory.

Not being a thief, Steve counted upon relinquishing his right to his half at any time that Temple paid back just what had been advanced. But it became evident very soon that Temple would never pay back anything. Though Doctor Bridges found nothing very much the matter with him, nevertheless Temple died less than two weeks later.

During those two weeks Steve had not seen Terry. With word of the girl's bereavement, however, he had gone immediately to her. She looked at him curiously, saying quietly that the boys were doing all that was necessary and had asked him to go.

Then, after another two weeks, he had ridden again to the Temple ranch. He found it deserted, doors and windows shut, dead leaves thick in the path. His heart leaped and thereafter knocked hard at his ribs; Terry was gone and had said nothing to him. He turned and went home, bitter and angry and hurt.

Where had she gone? He didn't know; he told himself he didn't care; certainly he would bite his tongue out before he would ask any of her friends. But he knew

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within himself that he did care as he had cared about nothing else in the world; and he asked himself a thousand times—

"Where has little Terry gone?"

For the world was not right without her; the sunlight was thin; the season of bursting buds was but a pale, lack-luster imitation of Spring. And as the long, hot days dragged by and the verdure died on hill and plain and dusty mountainside, he asked himself.

"When will she come back to us?"

Long after every one else had heard and forgotten the story, or at least had given over all thinking upon it, Steve heard how Terry had drawn against the last of the inconsiderable legacy left her long ago by her Spanish mother, and had gone to San Juan.

She had friends there; the banker's wife, Mrs. Engle, and her fluffy-haired daughter, Florrie, had opened their arms to her and made her tarry with them until the family made their annual trip East. Then Terry had gone with them.

And never a word to Steve Packard. He cursed himself, tried to curse her and found that he couldn't quite make a go of it, and settled down to good, hard work and the job of forgetting what a pair of gray eyes looked like and how two certain red lips smiled, and the tinkly notes of a laughing voice.

In the good, hard work of stock-ranching he succeeded more than well; in the other task he set himself he failed utterly. Never, when alone out on the range a shadow fell across, did he fail to look up quickly with his lips half-forming to the word, "Terry!" And, after all this time, still no word from her, no word of her.

Eight thousand dollars he had paid to Temple. The remaining two thousand of his father's heritage he had turned over promptly to his grandfather to apply on his own indebtedness. He had consulted with Bill Royce and Barbee and had cut down his crew of men, thereby curtailing expenses.

He had sold a few head of beef cattle and banked the money for the men's wages and current expenses. By the same means he had managed to keep abreast of his interest payments to old man Packard and had even paid off a little more of the principal. Then, catching the market right "going and coming," he had bought a lot of young cattle from an overstocked ranch adjoining, and had made a second profitable sale later.

Finally, to indicate that he was still in the game and playing it to win, consequently overlooking never a bet, he had cashed in pretty fortunately on a section of his timber-land.

The Rollston mills were just opening upon the other side of the mountains; he showed the firm's buyer a stretch of his big timber and closed the deal to their common satisfaction. And with every deal of this sort old man Packard felt his grip being pried loose from Ranch Number Ten.

From the beginning Steve had been puzzled to know what to do with the Temple outfit. Terry had paid off the men and had let them go; the stock on the place she had left, and without a word, to Steve's care. Since the place was well stocked, chiefly with young cattle, there was enough here to demand the attention which so busy a man as Steve Packard could not give.

He talked matters over with Bill Royce and in the end sent both Bill and Barbee to the Temple place, riding over once or twice a week himself to see how matters went.

And so the months dragged by. Twice, swearing to himself that he was doing so only because the management of the business made it absolutely necessary, Steve wrote to Terry. He got no answer. He did not even know if she had received his notes. The first he had signed, by the way, "Yours very truly." The second ended, "Respectfully, S. Packard."

"Terry's havin' the time of her life," Bill Royce startled him by announcing one day out of a clear sky.

"How do you know?" asked Steve sharply.

"Oh, she writes letters to her frien's," said Royce. "One of the boys brought word from the Norton place. Terry wrote her an' wrote some folks in Red Creek an' wrote the Lanes an' ——"

"Appears to be quite a letter-writer," remarked Steve stiffly. "And she's having the time of her life, is she?"

"Sure," said Royce innocently. "Why not? The boys are bettin' she's dead gone on some young down-East jasper an' that maybe she'll be married in no time. What do you think, huh, Steve?"

"Where is she?" demanded Steve, very brusk about it.

"—— if I know," admitted Royce. "Chicago, I think. Or New York. Or Pennsylvany. One of them towns. Shucks.

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She'd ought to come on home where she belongs."

"Oh, I don't know," said Steve.

But in Royce's ears the voice didn't ring quite true. It was meant to be careless in the extreme and—no, it didn't ring quite true.

HOT, cloudless skies as the season dragged on; dry, burning fields under a blazing sun, the cattle seeking shade wherever it was to be had, crowding at the water-holes, browsing early and late and frequenting the cooler cañons during the heat of the days. And nights of stars and a vast silence and emptiness.

A girl had come, had for a little posed laughing, outlined against the window of a man's soul, had flashed her unforgettable gray eyes at him and had gone. And so, and just because of her, the blistering hills seemed but ugly, lonely miles; the nights under a full moon were just the more silent and empty.

But Steve Packard held on, grown grim and determined. He had entered the game, lightly enough he had demanded his stack of chips, now he would stay for the showdown. Either he would clear his ranch of its mortgage and thus make clear to his meddlesome old grandparent that he was a man grown and no mere boy to be disciplined and badgered willy-nilly, or else his meddlesome old grandparent would in truth "smash" him.

In either case there would be the end seen. For, win or lose, Steve, tired of the game, would draw out and set his back to Ranch Number Ten and the country about it and go back to the old rudderless life of vagabondage. Just because a girl had come, had tarried and then had gone.

So, though the game had long ago lost its zest, Steve Packard like any other thoroughbred played on for a finish. Now and then, but seldom, he saw Blenham. Often, in little, annoying, mean ways Blenham made himself felt. Early in the season Steve's riders had found three of his steers dead on the outskirts of the range; a rifle-bullet had done for each one of them.

Since old man Packard had promised to stop at nothing, since Blenham was full of venom, Steve never for a moment doubted whose hand had fired the three shots. But he merely called his cowboys together, told them what had happened, ordered them to keep their eyes open and their guns oiled, and hoped and longed for the time when he himself could come upon Blenham busied with some act like this.

There were other episodes which he attributed to Blenham though he must admit in each case that anything in the vaguest way approaching a proof was lacking. Just before he closed the deal with the lumber company that had taken over his timber-tract a forest-fire had broken out. Luck and a fortuitous shifting of the wind had saved him from a heavy loss.

Incidents, these and others of their kind, served to fill Steve with rage; but Blenham's supreme blows—Blenham's and old man Packard's—were reserved for late in the dry season when they fell hardest.

A growing shortage of feed and the necessity for cash for the forthcoming substantial sum to be paid on the mortgage held by his grandfather, combined with the fact that his lean acres were overstocked, drove Steve in search of a market late in the Summer. Bill Royce shook his head and raised his objections.

"Everybody else is doin' the same thing an' at the same time," he said lugubriously. "Which'll mean the market all glutted up so's you won't get no kind of figger. If you could only hold on till next Spring."

But Steve merely said—

"Oh, well, Bill, it's all in a lifetime," and shaped his plans for a sale.

And within ten days there came an offer which startled him. It was from the big buyers, Doan, Rockwell & Haight, who, their communication said, knew his line of stock thoroughly and were prepared to pay the top prices for all he had. He estimated swiftly and sent a man hurrying into town with a message to go by wire; he would round up between a hundred and fifty and two hundred head and would have them in San Juan when desired.

"Old Doan's a sport and a wise boy, both," announced Steve triumphantly when he made the news known to Bill Royce. "He knows high-grade stuff and he's willing to pay the price." He narrowed his eyes speculatively. "We'll scare up close to two hundred head, William. And they'll bring us just about twenty thousand. Maybe a a thousand or so above that. And, Bill, did you ever know the time when twenty thousand dollars would look more like twenty thousand full moons just showing up over the sky-line?"

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Bill's grin reflected Steve's lively satisfaction. Now there would be the money for d Hell-Fire Packard's next payment ıere would be a long respite from him; ıere would be ample feed for the rest of the ıttle. Steve might even spend a part of ıe money for a herd of calves to be had ırt cheap just now from the Biddle Morris ıairy outfit, down near San Juan.

The prospect was exceedingly bright; ıst as if in truth a string of full moons ere shining down upon them. And still ıere was the shadow, even at this time, the ıadow cast by Terry's absence and silence. ı she were only here to rejoice with them.

Steve snorted his disgust with himself, got n a horse and went streaking across the elds, riding hard as was a habit here of ate, yelling an order to Barbee as he went. Barbee's innocent blue eyes followed him houghtfully; then Barbee shrugged and pat and thereafter called to his men to "get usy." The round-up began immediately.

Then came a handful of long, hot, feverishly busy days. Strayed steers carrying he Number Ten brand were hazed back to he big fenced-in meadows from the mountain slopes, were counted and held, in an ver swelling herd. There was little rest or the men, who shifted from one sweating ıorse to another and rode late and early.

Word came from Doan setting the date or the delivery in San Juan. Steve wired ıis satisfaction with the arrangement, undertaking to have the cattle in the stockpens just out of the town two or three days before Doan's coming. And no one knew better than did Steve Packard the true size of the job he had on his hands at this time of year and with a herd of close to two hundred wild steers.

The drive began one morning in the dark, long before the dawn. Steve estimated that he could make the Rio Frio the first night and had arranged beforehand with the Talbot boys for the night's pasturage. The second day would find them on the edge of the bad lands; his wagons hauling baled hay were to push on ahead and be waiting at the only sufficient water-holes to be found within a number of miles. San Juan in four days was the schedule.

"We'll lose weight all along the road," he conceded. "But it can't be helped. And a couple of day's rest and lots of feed and water in San Juan before Doan shows up will put back a part of the lost weight."

He had made allowances for a hard drive. Nevertheless the actuality was a sterner matter than he had foreseen. All along the way the feed was scant. Water was low in the holes; Rio Frio for the first time in years was a mere series of shallow pools. The blazing heat was such that men and horses and steers all suffered terribly.

At the end of the second day he ordered a full dozen of the less hardy of his beasts cut out from the herd and turned into a neighboring range; it was questionable if they would have been able to drag on the two remaining days, and even had they done so they would have brought no top price from the buyer.

The drive was made on schedule time. Circumstances not only permitted but insisted. There were no places for loitering; there were only the major water-holes upon which Steve had counted, the distances between them regulating each day's progress. And so the stock was in San Juan a full two days before the time for Doan's coming.

For Steve the two days dragged heavily. He camped with his herd on the edge of the settlement, allowing the boys to disport themselves as they saw fit a large part of the time, himself having little desire for the bad whisky and crooked gaming of La Casa Blanca.

Tuesday morning Doan was to arrive. Steve met the stage and one glance showed him that Doan was not on it. He asked the driver if he knew anything of Doan and the man shook his head. Steve supposed that he was coming up from the railroad by auto and so idled about the town all forenoon, waiting.

By midday, when Doan still failed to put in an appearance, Steve had grown impatient. By the middle of the afternoon his impatience gave place to anger. He had kept his appointment, bringing his herds over a hard trail, and Doan, with nothing to do but travel luxuriously, had failed him.

But it was not until the stage came in Wednesday morning and again brought no Doan and no word of Doan that Steve telephoned a message to the nearest Western Union office at Bidwell demanding to know what the trouble was. Not only was he on heavy expenses; his mood never had been one to take kindly to the long waiting game. And yet he was forced to wait all that day and all the next day with no word from Doan.

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He telegraphed again Wednesday night, a third time Thursday morning. No answers came. But a little before noon, Thursday, Doan came. Came by automobile from the railroad, a man with him. Steve saw them as they drove into town; he noted Doan's thin face and his tall form in the gray linen duster; then he marked the man with him. The man was Blenham.

Steve, grown irritable through these long hours of inaction and uncertainty, pushed straightway to Doan bent upon demanding an explanation. He got an inkling of one from an unexpected quarter, Blenham's lips.

"We sure appreciate this, Mr. Doan," Blenham said, getting down and offering his hand to the cattle-buyer. "Count on me an' ol' man Packard doin' you a favor any time. So long."

And casting to Steve a look of blended triumph and venom he hurried down to the stable and his horse.

"Mr. Doan," said Steve bluntly, "what in —— name do you mean by treating me this way?"

Doan turned his thin impassive face with the hawk-eyes toward young Packard.

"Who do you happen to be?" he asked coolly.

"I'm Steve Packard from Ranch Number Ten. And I've got a herd of steers out here that's been waiting for you some time now."

"Oh, yes," said Doan, still very cool. "Got my wire, didn't you, saying that I was unavoidably detained?"

"I did not!" snapped Steve. "Detained by what? Blenham?"

"Strange," murmured Doan.

He got down from his car and stretched his long legs.

"I've had a new secretary, Mr. Packard. I found out that he drank. He has been discharged. Hem. Let me see: You've got about fifty steers, haven't you?"

"I've got a hundred and eighty six," Steve said sharply, staring at Doan's inscrutable face and wondering just what was up.

"A hundred and eighty-six!" Doan shook his head. "I couldn't take that many on just now; I've made other plans. Unless, of course, you are in a position to tempt me to buy by making me a very attractive figure!"

Steve came a sudden step nearer, his eyes blazing, his two fists clenched.

"What's this game of yours?" he demanded. "Out with it. What are you up to? You wired me an offer of ten to twelve cents, twelve and a half for the fancy."

"What!" cried Doan. "Why, my dear fellow, you must have lost your senses! It can't be that that secretary of mine. Why, with the market the way it is now I don't have to pay more than seven and eight cents."

Steve waited for no more. His days of waiting were past. He drew back, swung from the shoulder and struck with all of his might. His fist against Doan's chin hurled the lean body of the cattle-buyer half across the street.

"Barbee," said Steve quietly, "round up the boys. We start our herd back in ten minutes."

And Barbee, taking stock of Steve's white face, went hastily on his errand.

XXII

"DEAR me, Mr. Man! How savage you do look!"

Steve started and whirled. No; this time he was not dreaming. It was Terry.

Terry laughed lightly, deliciously. She had grown prettier. She had learned a new way to smile. No, it was just the old way, after all. But she had discovered a new way to do her hair, an amazingly charming way. Her lips were redder than ever before; her eyes were gayer and grayer and softer and sweeter. Her voice tinkled with new, thrilling music. She was just exactly perfect in Steve Packard's eyes.

"You're super," said Steve. "You're superlative. You haven't done a thing all these long, weary months except grow more devilishly attractive."

"Are you as savage as you looked?" she asked swiftly.

For a brief instant he turned his eyes away from her and gazed after a herd that was moving slowly toward the north, Barbee and the other boys heading again toward the home range. But, no matter what rage and sullen chagrin lay in his heart, his eyes, returning to Terry, showed that already her coming had worked its change. He appeared almost content.

"Are you going to shake hands?" he asked.

"Shall I?" she asked. "We are to be good friends after all."

"Or, are you going to kiss me?"

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Terry arched her brows at him. But there was a live fire in her eyes and a crimsoning tide under her lovely skin.

"Smarty!" cried the old Terry. "Just try getting fresh with me and you'll get your face slapped!"

Whereupon Steve's laughter boomed out joyously.

"It's Terry come home again!" he announced to the open meadow about them. "Terry herself."

Was it Terry herself? She seemed strangely embarrassed all of a sudden. Just why? Terry didn't know.

"We are going out in my car," she said hurriedly. It seemed that she must hasten to make some safe remark each time that his eyes, busied with her, rested upon her eyes. "We'll be at the ranch long before you get your cows home. You may come to see me—if you please to."

"Who is we?" he asked.

"Oh," said Terry, "that means Mrs. Randall, who is going to be cook and chaperon."

San Juan dozed in the late afternoon heat. The corrals were between them and the quiet street. He threw out his arms, caught Terry in them and kissed her. And Terry, whipping back, slapped his face.

"You—you——" she panted, her face scarlet.

He touched tenderly with his finger-tips the place where her hand had struck him.

"I'll be over to call on you and Mrs. Randall," he said. "Real soon."

NOW as Steve Packard rode slowly after his cowboys and a diminishing herd, the dust-filled air, dry and hot as it was, seemed sweet and caressing to his temples; his eyes mused happily. Blenham had just worsted him, Blenham had tricked him, had put him to the heavy expense of the long drive, had battered his steers up for him, had laughed at him.

Very well; tally for Blenham. A matter to be considered in due time. A body blow, perhaps, but then what in God's good world is a strong body for if not to buffet and be buffeted? He and Blenham would come to grips again, soon or late, and in some way still hidden by the future matters would finally adjust themselves.

All considerations with which only some dim future was concerned. Just now, in the living, breathing, quivering present there was room for but the one thought: Terry had come back to him.

Yes. Terry had come back to him. And he had kissed her. And she had slapped him. He smiled and again his finger-tips went their way tenderly to his cheek. He had kissed her because he loved her, meaning her no harm, offering her no insult. She had slapped him because she was Terry, and because she couldn't very well help it. Not because she did not love him!

Somewhere in the world, off in some misty distance, there was a man named Blenham, a trickery, treacherous, cruel hound of a man. He would require attention presently. Just now——

"You've come back to me!" whispered Steve Packard.

And he sighed and shook himself and wished longingly that the return drive were over and that he had a bath and a shave and were just calling at the Temple ranch.

Though presently he overhauled his men Steve rode all that day pretty well apart, maintaining a thoughtful silence which Barbee and the others supposed had to do solely with the failure of his plans for a good market. His men knew that he had banked pretty heavily on this deal; and that now again he would be confronted by the old problem of finding sufficient feed to pull his herds through.

Hay was scarce and high and would need to be hauled far, making its final cost virtually prohibitive. The herders, grumbling among themselves, were for the most part of the opinion that he should have accepted his defeat at Blenham's hands and sold to Doan at a sacrifice figure.

That night they camped at the Bitter Springs, making but a brief stop to water and feed and rest the road-weary cattle. Then in the night and moving slowly they pushed on planning to get to the next waterholes before the heat of another day. And now Steve, giving his orders to Barbee, left them and struck out ahead.

There was small need of accommodating his impatience to the sluggish progress of the leg-dragging brutes and there were matters to be arranged. Further, it was his intention to have a talk with Terry Temple just as soon as might be.

That day Terry's automobile with shrieking horn swept on by him. He caught a glimpse of two veils, a brown and a black; the car's top was up and shaded the riders.

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"She hasn't lost a speck of her impudence!"

He frowned after her departing car, praying in his heart for a puncture or a stalled engine. She deserved as much for the way in which she tooted her infernal horn. But his prayer went unanswered and his displeasure vanished presently as he pushed on steadily in her wake, eager to come to the end of his ride.

But he must never entirely forget the panting herd straggling on far behind him, choking and coughing in its own dust. He must arrange somewhere, somehow for pasturage. So he made a détour and looked in on Brocky Lane first, then on Rod Norton. Both old friends were glad to see him and gave him hard, brown hands in grips that were good to feel.

But they merely shook their heads when he mentioned his errand. Lane had sold a few head last week; Norton was afraid that he would have to make a sacrifice sale himself. They would do anything that they could, but it was only too clear that they could not give him that which they themselves did not have and could not get.

"Old man Packard," offered Norton bluntly, "is the only man I can think of who has pasture to rent. Drop Off Valley, just up in the mountains back of your place."

Steve laughed shortly and swung up into his saddle.

"So long, Nort," he said colorlessly. "The old man would burn his grass off before he'd let me have it."

And he rode on, two problems in his mind, both growing more difficult as he drew nearer the home ranch. Problem One: Just what was Terry going to say? Problem Two: How was he going to pull his stock through?

As if he did not already have enough on his hands Bill Royce greeted him at the home ranch-house with the significant word—

"Trouble!"

"I know it," grunted Packard, swinging down stiffly from his saddle. "What kind this time, Bill?"

"Blenham-brand, I'd reckon," said Bill angrily. Steve noted that both of the old hand's cheeks were flushed hotly. "Barbee telephoned in about four hours ago. Seven steers dead, some more sick. An'," the explanation coming quickly, "Barbee's got the hunch Blenham had rode on ahead an' had poisoned the water-holes an'——"

"—— ——!" cried Steve, a sudden fury seeming to leap out upon him and take him by the throat. "Am I to stand everything from that man and from my old fiend of a grandfather? It's this and that and any —— thing they want to turn loose and here I stick like a cursed toadstool, doing nothing for want of proof! Proof," he snorted disgustedly. "Bill Royce, let's quit waiting for anything but just go get the trouble-seeking outfit!"

"Which sounds good to me," retorted Royce eagerly.

And yet when his rage cooled a bit Steve ground his teeth in his impotence. He must wait until Barbee came with what God chose to leave him of his steers; he must hear the foreman's account and decide whether Blenham were really at the bottom of this or if it were just his way and his men's to blame all things upon Blenham.

"The first thing, Bill," he said when he had turned his tired horse loose in the pasture, "is to decide what we are going to do with what cattle Blenham hasn't poisoned for us. We are fed off pretty short down at this end. I'll ride over to the Temple place and see if we can't arrange with Miss Terry to run a few head there."

"Yes," said Royce dryly. "I'd hurry if I was you, Steve. But, say!" He slapped his leg and jerked up his head. "How about the old Indian Valley, Drop Off Valley, as they call it now! Why, man, it's just the thing!"

"Gone crazy, Bill? When did my grandfather ever show any inclination to help out?"

Then Royce, thoroughly excited, explained. Andy Sprague from beyond the ridge had ridden by only yesterday afternoon. If Royce had only known at that time that Steve was bringing back the cattle from San Juan he would have arranged with Andy. For the man had said that he had just bought Drop Off Valley from old Packard; that he wouldn't want the range this year as he had only recently sold close. He would rent, and reasonably.

"There's close on a couple of thousan' acres in there; there's plenty water an' enough good grass to run two or three hundred head easy until your feed comes in again down this way. Nail him, Steve; for

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the love of Mike, nail Andy Sprague quick before the crooked little cuss finds out jus' how bad you need the pasture an' sticks you accordin'. Go nail him, Steve."

And Steve, seeing hope like a brightening flush of a new day, hurried to the corrals and a fresh horse. He was going straight after Andy Sprague. But——

"Guess I'll ride by the Temple place," he said carelessly.

XXIII

DROP OFF VALLEY, its name won to it by its salient feature, was but a long, narrow and very high plateau in the mountains lying to the east of Ranch Number Ten. It was well watered from springs at the upper end which wandered the entire length of the tract and spilled down into the chasm which cut in abrupt fashion across the lower end, making a natural and fearsome boundary.

From this portion of the "valley" one might kick a stone a sheer and dizzy distance down into the headwaters of Indian Creek, which indicated the beginning of the narrow pass which led through the mountains and to the misty blue hills of Old Mexico.

Here in the abundant, rich, dry feed wandered upward of two hundred head of Ranch Number Ten and Temple Ranch cattle, mingling freely, the herds of one outfit carrying their brands in and out of the herds of the other. A sign and a token that at last a certain dead-line had ceased to exist.

Steve had found Andy Sprague, as crooked a little man as he looked to be according to Bill Royce and others who should know, and had arranged with him for the leasing of the mountain pasturage. Less than a week later Sprague was back saying that he had seen Hell-Fire Packard and that that old mountain-lion had roared at him terribly, had threatened him with utter ruin if ever again he helped out Steve Packard and had bade him carry a message.

"Tell that —— young fool of a gran'son of mine," was the word Sprague gave Steve, "that right now I'm gettin' ready to polish him off final. Tell him what I done to him, blockin' his sale in San Juan, wasn't a patch on what I can do; tell him he'll lose more steers than he ever los' before. Tell him if he don't want to get hisself all mussed up in this deal he'd better come over to my place an' throw up his han's. I'm gettin' mad!"

Before having these words from Andy Sprague's twisted mouth Steve Packard had been puzzled to explain two matters: According to count, on one hand there were too few cattle by perhaps a score while on another hand there were too many by at least a half-dozen. And, though Terry Temple was directly concerned, he had said nothing to her.

The first mystifying suggestion that some strange juggling of stock had been going on came to him just before he had driven the hundred and eighty-six steers to San Juan. Rounding up his own stock and cutting it out from Temple stock, he had had the opportunity to check up carefully in Terry's interests.

Calves, cows, steers and horses, he knew to the head just what Terry numbered them. And in the round-up, going over his figures carefully, he had found that wearing the Temple brand there were six steers more than there should be. A matter of some five or six hundred dollars.

Were it only the financial end of it Steve would have thought little of the matter. But, going over the herd animal by animal, he made a discovery which shocked him. He found six big steers in the lot which wore fairly recently burned Temple brands—crudely scrawled over the brands of the Big Bend ranch, old man Packard's favorite outfit in the north.

It was impossible to know just how long ago a searing-hot iron had altered the range indication of ownership; Steve could merely stare and wonder and finally hazard a guess. Temple had been hard-driven; he had succumbed to temptation and opportunity as he had to whisky and many other things. Seeing life obliquely he had no doubt told himself that he was squaring accounts. So, in the end, Steve was inclined to believe.

Just what to do he did not know. It seemed best to him to bide his time, to keep his eyes open, to hope for the way out of an embarrassing situation. He would willingly have made restitution himself, to save Terry from knowing and to save her name from the smudge which old man Packard would eagerly put upon it were he offered the opportunity. And right here was the trouble; he did not care to let his grandfather know what had happened.

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While striving with this matter the other was brought to his attention. Also at the time of the round-up Barbee reported a black-and-white steer missing, the prize of the beef herd, said Barbee. Strayed into some far out-of-the-way cañon, perhaps. But as the days went by other cattle, finally totaling a score, were reported missing. And Steve remembered how one evening he and Terry from a log had watched Blenham driving off a string of steers.

"My beloved grandfather has no love for the courts of law," mused Steve many a time. "And he knows that in that I am like him. So to his way of thinking it's just Packard eat Packard and the rest of the world 'hands off.' And so he is going the limit. Well, I guess that's as good a way as any other."

The day came when Steve put his cattle into Drop Off Valley. The herds, his and Terry's, were counted twice, once as they filed through the gate of the round-up corrals, again as they were turned into the upland range. Two hundred thirty-four head.

"Two hundred and thirty-four head where I defy Blenham or the devil himself to steal a single one of them," said Steve positively.

For though there were no fences here nature had raised sufficient barriers in the way of the sheer Drop Off Chasm cutting across the southern end of the plateau and in rocky, uninviting and all but impassable mountain-peaks on north and east and a section of the western boundary.

It seemed the simplest matter in the world here with but ordinary diligence and vigilance on the part of his cowboys to make good Steve's vow. Therefore, with Barbee in charge of the men here and under instructions to keep the eyes of trusted night-riders always open, Steve thought to have heard the last of cattle losses.

The steers were to be counted every day if Barbee thought necessary; so much Steve had said coolly, merely for the emphasis of the words. Barbee had looked at him curiously, making no rejoinder and going about his business with a puzzled look on his face.

A week later Barbee reported to Steve down at Ranch Number Ten.

"Five steers gone," he said succinctly, his eyes hard and expectant, challenging his employer's.

"Gone?" repeated Steve. "Where? And when?"

"I don't know," replied Barbee. "I missed 'em four days ago. I wouldn't believe they'd gone for good. I didn't see how they could of gone. I've looked for 'em ever since; I've rode into an' out of every cañon an' pass; I've been everywhere they could go. But—they're gone. Five big steers."

For a moment their eyes, Steve's as hard as Barbee's, held steady and unwinking in a deeply probing gaze.

"Barbee," said Steve after a little, "remember the night Blenham tried to bribe you with a thousand-dollar bill?"

Barbee flushed and nodded.

"I get you," he said quietly. "Think he's bought me up maybe?"

"I don't know what to think. But this much is clear: If you are on the level it's up to you to see that I don't lose any more stock. And it's also up to you to find where those five steers went. And get them back. Every —— hoof of them."

THAT night Steve himself spent the long hours of the night in Drop Off Valley, a rifle over his arm. He had ordered his men to carry guns and, if Blenham or another man were detected driving off his cattle, to shoot and to shoot to kill.

But the next day he returned to the home ranch. He trusted his cowboys—all but Barbee and in Barbee's case he was not sure what to think—and it was only too clear to him that there were enough men there to cope with the situation without his interference. Two days later Barbee reported to him again.

The boy's face was haggard and drawn, his eyes burning sullenly.

"Six head more gone!" he announced defiantly. His look said plainly: "What are you going to say about it? They're gone."

"So you've turned cattle-thief, have you, Barbee?" was what Steve said.

A sickly flush stained Barbee's hollow cheeks.

"No!" he snapped hotly. "I ain't. But——"

He swung on his heel and started to the door. Steve called him back.

"What are you going to do, Barbee?"

"I'm goin' an' get Blenham," said Barbee between his teeth. "I been wantin' him a long time. Now this is his work an' he makes it look like it's mine. I'm goin' an' get him. It's come to a show-down at last."

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"If it is Blenham," Steve offered coldly, "and if you are playing square with me, how does it happen that he can get away with a thing like this? Right under your nose—and you not know? It sounds—you know how it sounds, Barbee."

"I don't know how he does it," growled Barbee. "I don't know how a man could run off a string of cows like that in them mountains an' not leave no tracks. Why, there ain't half a dozen places where they could be drove out'n the valley an' through the cliffs, an' I been watchin' every one of them places myself all night an' keepin' the other boys ridin' until they're saddle-weary. An'—an' six head more gone——"

"You're either a clever little actor, Mr. Barbee," muttered Steve sharply, "or you are straight and I'm hanged if I know which. Just leave Blenham alone for a while; go back to your job."

Barbee, his spurs dragging disconsolately, went out. Steve saw how the boy's shoulders slumped and again asked himself if Barbee were acting or if Blenham were simply too sharp for him? In the end he decided that he had better move his headquarters to Drop Off Valley.

That same day there came a cowboy riding from the Big Bend ranch bringing a brief note from Steve's grandfather. It ran:

DEAR STEPHEN: Better not go too far, my boy. Eye for an eye is first-class gospel. And there ain't no game yet I ever been bluffed out on. Guess you understand. PACKARD.

Steve didn't altogether understand but the messenger could add nothing save that the old man was chuckling with Blenham when he gave the message. Steve, in no mood to hear of his grandfather's high good humor, tore the letter to bits, distributed them upon the afternoon wind and told the lean cowboy that he could tell Grandfather Packard and Blenham to go straight to ——. The cowboy laughed and rode on.

STEVE, riding slowly through the lengthening shadows falling through the pines of the mountain-slopes before one comes to Drop Off Valley, was overtaken by Terry Temple riding furiously. Terry's horse was dripping with sweat; Terry's face was troubled; there was a look almost of terror in her eyes.

"Steve Packard," she cried out as she came abreast of him, and they stared into each other's eyes in the dusk under the big trees. "Tell me everything you know about those stolen steers! Everything."

So she knew, too? Yet he had cautioned Barbee not to talk and to instruct the other boys to keep their mouths shut until such time as they could understand this hand being played in the dark.

"Who told you?" he asked quickly.

"I saw them!" she told him, her spirit shining like fire in her eyes. "The whole six of them. I knew they were not our cattle. I saw how the brands had been worked, clumsily worked. Oh, my God, Steve Packard, what does it mean?"

Now it flashed upon him. Terry was not speaking of the cattle lost from the upland valley; she referred to those half-dozen big steers roaming on the Temple ranch whose brands had been crudely altered from the sign of the Big Bend outfit to the sign of her father's. Slowly the red blood of shame, shame for her, crept up into his cheeks, dusky under his tan.

"Terry," he began lamely.

But she halted him with the word, her ear catching the subtle note of sympathy, her hand upflung, her temper flaring out that he, of all men, should think shame of her blood.

"My father was never a thief!" she cried hotly, her voice ringing clear and certain. "Not that, Steve Packard. Don't you dare say that! And yet— You saw them, you knew, and you didn't say a word to me, to anybody!"

"I didn't know what to say or what to do," he explained gently. "I thought it best just to wait, to hope for the sense of all this infernal jumble. I hoped——"

"You big fool!" she called him with all due emphasis. "Just like all of the rest of your blundering sex. If the good Lord had stopped with the job of making Adam, his whole creation wouldn't have been worth the snap of my thumb and finger."

"It isn't, anyway," said Steve. "I wouldn't swap your little finger for a king's gold crown——"

"Moonshine," cut in Terry. "Listen to me, Steve Packard: You saw those swapped brands and you kept your mouth shut."

"It is generally considered——"

"I said to listen to me! You didn't say a word to me because you believed my dad was a cattle-thief!"

Steve, despite himself, shifted uneasily in

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his saddle and finally dropped his eyes. Terry sat there staring at him fixedly, her own eyes wide open and again harboring that look that was almost fear.

"You—you— Oh, Steve Packard! This is contemptible of you!"

Then he lifted his eyes and looked at her soberly enough.

"Terry Temple," he said very gently, "I pray God that you are right and that I am wrong. I did not know, I only saw what I saw and wondered and kept my mouth shut. But—listen to me now, Terry Temple. You are not the one to dodge an issue, no matter how hard it is to face it. Tell me: If your father did not shift those brands, then who did? And why? Don't you see that is what it amounts to; that is what we've got to answer?"

"Blenham!" she told him swiftly, hardly waiting for him to finish. "Blenham, under orders. Orders from your precious old thief of a grandfather!"

He smiled back at her, hoping to coax an answering smile to her lips and into her troubled eyes. But she only shook her head and went on steadily.

"Recrimination of a sort——"

"Recrimination is quite some word, no matter what it means," sniffed Terry. "But we can leave it out. In words of one syllable your old thief of a grandfather ordered his pet dog and sub-thief to go tie something on poor old dad. And you fell for it! You ought to go to a school for the simple-minded."

"Just what," demanded Steve equably, "do you suppose a play like that would win for anybody? Any time my old thief of a grandfather, as you call him, hands an enemy of his several hundred dollars in beef cattle, why, just please wake me up."

"A play like that is just what old Hell-Fire would be up to right about now," she told him positively. "You have been proving something too much for him to swallow whole and boots on; your chipping in with us that time you took the mortgage over made him hungrier than ever to gobble up the crowd of us. So he plays the dirty trick of making it appear my father is a cattle-thief."

"Blenham might do a trick like that. My grandfather wouldn't. That is, I don't think he would."

"Better hedge! Wouldn't he, though! He's always been as mean as gar-broth; the older he gets the meaner and nastier he is. He'd do anything to double-cross a Temple and you know it. It's one crooked play; there'll be more like it. Just you see, Steve Packard. And the next one—at least if it concerns me—you see that you let me know about it instead of going around like a dumb man."

Then he blurted out word of the recent losses from Drop Off Valley. For her herds mingled there with his and a part of the losses were to be borne by her.

"I'm on my way there now," he concluded. "I've an idea——"

"You haven't!" she interrupted. "Steve Packard, I don't believe you ever had an idea in your life. Don't you know—don't you know what's going with those steers up there?"

"Do you?"

"You just bet your life I do! It's that crook of a Yellow Barbee, in cahoots with that crook of a Blenham who's taking orders from that crook of an old Hell-Fire Packard! Can't you see their play?"

"I rather think I can. But I don't happen to be as positive about the unknown as you do."

"You're just a man," said Terry. "That's why. And now you are on your way to the feeding-grounds up there, to come in and say, 'Here I am, Barbee, come to watch you and see that you don't steal any more stock for me tonight.' That the idea?"

Steve laughed.

"Not exactly. I had intended leaving my horse before I got to the rim of the valley and of going on on foot, not telling everybody what I was about."

"And you'd come to the rim of the valley either by Hell Gate pass or through the old Indian Trail, wouldn't you? And Barbee or Blenham would see that both ways were watched."

"You seem to know the trails rather well," he began, but she merely broke in:

"That's not all I know about this neck of the woods, either, Steve Packard. Maybe it's lucky for you and for me too that you told me all this. I'll take you into Drop Off Valley tonight and Blenham and Yellow Barbee can watch all they please and never guess we're there. For there's a way up that not even Blenham knows and where they will never look for us. Come on, Steve Packard; use a spur."

She shot by him, leading the way.

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So Steve and Terry rode through the forests, passing from the dull fringe of the day into the calm glory of the night, feeling the air grow cooler and sweeter against their faces, sensing the shutting-in about them of the gentle serenity of the wilderness. They followed little-traveled trails where she rode ahead and he, following close at her horse's heels, was glad each time that an open space beyond or a ridge crested showed him her form pricked clearly against the sky.

They spoke less and less as they went on. Deeper grew the silences into which they made their way, with only the gush of a mountain brook or the fluttering of a startled bird or the rustle of dead leaves under some alert little wild thing, just these sounds occasionally and ever the soft thud of shod hoofs on leaf-mold and loose soil.

The stars multiplied swiftly, grew in brilliancy. But down here close to the face of the earth where the shadows were, the dark was thick, impenetrable.

For many a mile Terry led the way through the forests. Steve was on the verge of suggesting that she had lost her way when she turned off to the right and down a long slope in so decided a fashion that he closed his lips to his suspicion.

She knew where she was going; as he once again saw her body against a patch of sky—she had gone down the slope and climbed a ridge ahead—and as he noted her carriage and the poise of a chin for the instant clearly outlined, he knew that she was sure of herself. Well, she was that sort of a girl; she might have confidence in herself and a man might place his confidence with hers.

So at last Terry brought him down into a creek-bed and the bottom on a steep-sided cañon. He merely said, "I'll take your word for it!" when she told him that this was the deep-cleft ravine which lay like a gash at the base of the sheer Drop Off Cliffs.

Yonder, perhaps a mile ahead and yet prominently asserting itself to their view because of a certain widening and straightening of the cañon here, a bold head of cliffs stood out like a monster carving in ebony. Up there, at the top of these cliffs, was the southern end of Drop Off Valley.

"And it is up those cliffs that we are going," Terry announced when, having drawn nearer, they stopped again to gaze upward. "There's a trail climbing straight up from the bed of the pass; a trail to go hand-and-foot style. Once on top we'll be among Barbee's herds, Barbee guessing nothing of our coming since he'll be busy watching the other ways in. And——Look!"

They were close together and she gripped his arm in her sudden amazement while she threw out one hand pointing. He heard her little gasp; he looked upward; an astonished ejaculation broke from his own lips. A breathless moment and already the thing, appearing from the black nothingness, silhouetted but a moment against the sky, was gone and he vaguely saw Terry's face turned toward him while they sought to find each other's eyes and know if each had seen what the other had glimpsed.

"It's impossible!" he muttered. "We are imagining things."

"Wait!" said Terry. "Maybe after all——"

They waited impatiently, their blood atingle. And in a very few moments there was, seeming absurd and impossible, a repetition of the vision which had so startled them; a black form at the head of the cliffs, the field of star-strewn sky back of it limning it into vivid distinctness—the ebon bulk of a steer moving straight out from the top of the precipice, straight out a half-dozen feet into nothingness of empty space, then slowly descending through the air, gone silently in the deeper shadows of the cañon below!

"Block and tackle!" muttered Steve abruptly. "A small steel cable. Two or three men up there; a man on horseback down below. And while Barbee and the boys guard the other end ——"

"Blenham puts one across on us down here!" Terry finished it for him.

"Only here's where we put one over on Blenham," rejoined Steve hotly. He threw a cartridge into his rifle-barrel and spurred ahead of her. "You stay here, Terry. I——"

"Will I?" Terry retorted with animation. "Not on your life, Steve Packard! If this is the beginning of Blenham's finish—well, I'm in on it."

XXIV

TERRY had sensed something of the truth. In its way here was the beginning of the end of many things. Before she and Steve Packard, making what haste was possible in the thick dark and with what silence was allowed

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them, had gone a score of paces deeper into the cañon the crack of a rifle shouted its reverberating message of menace back and forth in the rocky ravine, a spurt of flame showed where the rifleman stood upon a pinnacle of rock almost directly above their heads and there came the further sounds of men's startled voices and the scampering of horses' hoofs, fleeing southward through the pass.

"They had lookouts all along!" cried Steve over his shoulder, discarding caution and secrecy and throwing his rifle to his shoulder. "Better hold back, Terry!"

He fired, accepted the precarious chances offered him by an uneven and unknown trail in the dark and raced on deeper and deeper into the long chasm. It seemed to him that he had glimpsed something moving at the top of the cliffs just about the place whence Blenham's men had lowered the steers. He asked no question but threw up his gun-barrel and fired again.

From straight in front of him there came back to his ears the clang and thud of iron horseshoes upon granite, the rattle of rocks along the trail; now and again he saw a spark struck out underfoot. Then, far ahead as the cañon widened suddenly and a little thinning of the darkness resulted, he made out dim, running forms, and again he fired from his own leaping horse.

A flying bullet might find a target and it might not; at any rate the sound of the shots volleyed and boomed echoingly between the stone walls imprisoning them, and Barbee or one of Barbee's men should hear. Steve was estimating hopefully as he dashed on after the fugitives and as Terry dashed on after him, that the men at the top of the cliffs would not try to come down now, not knowing who or how many the attackers were, but would seek escape above.

Then, if his cowboys heard and rode toward the cliffs, it was all in the cards that they might intercept at least a couple of Blenham's tools.

A running form almost at his side drew his attention briefly, and all but drew hot, questing lead after it. Then he made out that it was but one of the stolen steers, abandoned now, and pressed by, firing time after time into the cañon ahead of him. And behind him he heard Terry's voice, eager and fearless, crying out:

"Good boy, Steve Packard! We'll get 'em yet!"

A spur of flame from far ahead and close to the wall of the cañon, the crack of another rifle, and the long drawn-out whine of a bullet singing its vicious way overhead, and again Steve fired, answering shot with shot. He heard a man shout and fired in the direction of the voice. And then the only sounds rising from the narrow gorge were those of running horses and the accompanying noises of rattling stones.

Now the way was again tortuous, pitch-black, boulder-strewn. Steve slowed down rather than break his horse's legs or his own neck, not knowing whether to turn to right or left. In a moment of uncertainty he felt and heard Terry push ahead of him. He heard her hurrying on and followed, shouting to her to come back. Ten minutes later, out of the pass now and upon a low-lying ridge whence he could look across the hills billowing away darkly toward the southland, he came up with her again.

"They got off that way." She pointed south. "Saw one figure and maybe two going down the slope. There's no use following. The way is too open and it's too dark. They've got away after all."

"For tonight," said Steve. "But maybe the fellows at the top of the cliffs——"

"I'll show you the way up," said Terry.

So without delaying they turned back and came presently under Drop Off Cliffs again. Here they left their horses and, Terry showing the way, found the old path up the precipice. Along many a narrow shelf of rock they went, over many a gigantic granite splinter where foothold was precarious enough, up many a steep climb. But in their present mood they would have achieved even a more difficult and more hazardous task with eagerness and assurance. Twenty minutes brought them to the top.

"Who's that?" shouted a sudden voice as Steve's hat came up out of the void. "Hands up!"

"That you, Barbee?" grunted Steve. "Hands up? I'd drop a clean hundred feet if I did a fool trick like that. Did they get away? The men up here?"

He wriggled up to the top, lay on his stomach and gave a hand to Terry, drew her to lie a moment breathless at his side and then again turned to Barbee. There was another man with him and both were looking wonderingly at Steve and Terry.

"I never heard a man say," muttered the

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astounded Barbee, "that there was stair-steps up here! For a man' an' a girl to come up——"

"And for our cows to go down!" cried Steve, on his feet now and coming to Barbee's side. "You heard everything, Barbee? You know what has happened?"

"Yes," said Barbee. "A hundred yards over that way—" he pointed along the cliff's edge—"where a twisted cedar-tree stands in a little washout, not hardly to be noticed unless you're on the lookout for it, they had their pulleys hitched an' a long steel cable. It was easy shootin', come to think of it. Jus' rope a cow, cinch her up tight with two big straps they had all ready, slip a hook through the belly-band, an' lower away! Pretty smooth, huh?"

"And they all got away?"

"No, they didn't," said Barbee queerly. "I got one of 'em!"

"You did?" Steve swung back toward him eagerly. "Who is he, Barbee? And where is he? I want a talk with him."

Barbee shook his head and reached for his tobacco and papers. He was young after all, was Barbee, and this was his first man.

"Andy Sprague, it was," said Barbee. "He's dead now."

There fell a heavy, breathless silence upon the three standing there under the stars. Terry shivered as if with cold and drew a step closer to Steve; he felt her hand on his arm. Barbee lighted his cigaret, his hands steady but his face looking terribly serious in the brief-lived light shed upon it.

"I heard you shootin'," said Barbee. "I rode this way, on the jump. I was only about a mile up the valley; maybe a shade less. He had his horse close an' was on him an' poundin' leather lively to get out. We come pretty close to runnin' into each other. I hollered at him to hold on an' he jus' rode on his spurs an' I shot. Emptied my gun. Got him twice, bein' that lucky, an' him that unlucky. He slid off his cayuse an' clawed aroun' an—an' he's dead now," ended Barbee briefly.

"Did he tell you anything? Did he say anything that would implicate anybody?"

"Meanin'," said Barbee steadily, "did he squeal on his pals?"

"Just that. Did he mention any names?"

"No," replied Barbee thoughtfully. "He jus' cusses me an' died game. But this here was in his pocket."

He passed it to his employer. It was a bit of note-paper. Steve and Terry read it together as Steve struck one match after another. Then they looked into each other's faces, grown very tense, while Barbee smoked in silence. The few words were:

BLENHAM—This here Mex don't seem to know what I mean. Next time send a man as can talk English. Anyway I am coming tonight. I don't want no killing if it ain't necessary but there ain't going to be a hide or hoof left in Drop Off by morning.

And the signature, cramped and stiff, was that of Steve's grandfather.

"SO," MUTTERED Steve heavily. "The old man has gone the limit, has he? He meant it when he said he'd stop at nothing to smash me. And yet I can't believe——"

"Let me see it again," Terry commanded.

She took the paper from his fingers and with it his block of sulfur matches. For even Terry, to whom old man Packard was as relentless and unscrupulous as Satan himself, hesitated to believe that he was hand in glove with Blenham in this.

There might be a way to read between the lines, to come to some other understanding of the baffling situation. Evidently the old man had given the note to the "Mex" who did not know enough of the English language to carry word of mouth; the Mex had passed it to Sprague.

Steve and Barbee and the man with Barbee—an old Ranch Number Ten hand named Bandy Oliver—had stepped aside quietly. Terry stood with the note in her hand, forgetting it for the moment. So, at the last, matters had come to this: There lay a man over yonder, dead, with Barbee's lead in him.

And old man Packard was coming tonight, now of all times when Steve's heart was hard, when his brain was hot with his fury, when he had just come upon men stealing his stock and had learned that his own grandfather, the old mountain-lion from the north, was one of them.

"If they meet tonight," said Terry, "those two Packards, there are going to be other men killed. Good men and bad men. And, as likely as not, Blenham won't be one of them."

"There was another jasper with Sprague. He got away. That way, I think. Couldn't

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say but there might have been more; what with the dark an' the cattle scared an' churnin' aroun'."

Steve with Barbee and Bandy Oliver had moved slowly away and toward the upper end of the plateau. Detached words, fragments of their speech, floated back to her more and more indistinctly on the night wind that never sleeps upon these uplands.

Terry turned from them and stood for a little looking down into the black void of the cañon into which the stolen cattle had been lowered, from which she and Steve had just climbed. She fancied that the darkness down there was thinning. The dawn was coming up almost imperceptibly over the mountain-tops, filtering wanly into the depths of the cañons. The night had rushed by; it would soon be day.

And old man Packard had not come. Thank God for that. Down in her heart Terry was conscious of a leaping gladness. She knew, admitted now, that she had been afraid. A man lay dead over yonder; if Packard met Packard tonight there would be other men dead. Terry shivered and drew back from the edge of the precipice.

"It's always colder just before day," she told herself.

"Sunrise already?"

Steve's voice, borne to her ears with startling distinctness. He had not come nearer; maybe the dawn wind was stiffening, thus bearing his words to her more clearly. Or it might be that Steve had lifted his voice suddenly.

Why should a man be startled by a new sunrise? True, the night had gone quickly, but——

"The sun never rose there!" Steve's voice again, thrilling through her with its portent. "It's fire—range fire—in a dozen places!"

A bright glow lay across the far, upper end of Drop Off Valley. At first one might have done as Steve Packard did and wondered what had happened to the sun. The sky had merely brightened warmly, slowly, gradually, showing a hint of pink. And then, as the bone-dry grass here and there had caught, vivid streaks of flame and a veritable devil's dance of a myriad sparks shot high skyward. And, as Steve had cried out, not in one place only but in a dozen spots had the fires been lighted.

"To herald the wrathful coming of Hell-Fire Packard!"

Such was the thought springing full-fledged into Terry's brain, into Steve's, into Yellow Barbee's. A chain of fires had been started across the whole width of the feeding-grounds. Now the rising wind made of it a sudden burning barrier that extended from side to side of Drop Off Valley, came rushing toward the lower end, threatening to leave but a black, charred devastation of the precious pasturage.

Barbee had run and thrown himself upon his horse. Steve had grasped the dragging reins of Andy Sprague's mount. Terry saw him and his two cowboys swing about toward the upper end.

"Terry!" he shouted over his shoulder. "Down the cliffs again; quick! The fire is coming this way; the herds will stampede!"

There was only the sound of thudding hoofs as the three men rode furiously to meet the menace the dawn had brought and seek to grapple with it. Then that sound had gone and its place, for a little taken by heavy silence, gradually gave way to new sounds. The crack of rifles, faintly heard—thin voices of men shouting a long way off—a sound like that of a distant sea, moving restlessly—grown to suggest the coming of a storm that ever swelled in violence—and then a deep and deepening rumble, like thunder.

The herd had stampeded.

TO TERRY there came then, for the first time in her life, the sense of utter helplessness and hopelessness. At least the others were doing something, no matter how fruitless it might prove, while she was doing nothing. Steve was riding full tilt to meet the herd. She saw him and his men, strange figures in the uncertain light, looming big against the dawn sky and the fires' glow. They were shouting, waving their arms. Then, going down over as well of earth, they were lost to her.

Again and again there came to her the sound of shots and men's voices shouting, cursing, yelling wild commands, a rising clamor meant to divert the blind rush of frightened beasts, to turn them to right and left so that they might scramble out of the valley before they came to the lower end where Terry stood—where was the yawning chasm down into which many a great, terror-filled body was doomed to plunge to annihilation unless the way were found to swing the flood of fear aside in time.

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Barbee and Bandy Oliver and the other boys were obeying Steve's commands, doing all that they could, seeking frantically to split the herd and divert it and so save it. But all of the time the wind strengthened, the fires rose higher and higher against the sky, the sparks soared to rarer altitudes, were flung farther out, new fires were catching everywhere.

The tall, dry grass was burning in a hundred places. The herd, sweeping on, was snorting its terror, yielding absolutely to the blind instinct of flight. And steadily the thunderous murmuring sound from the hoof-smitten earth rose and swelled. Closer and closer they came. Terry could distinguish Steve's voice.

In her hand were the matches he had given her in order that she might read again his grandfather's letter. A little gasp broke from her lips. The letter fluttered from her hand, no longer of the slightest importance, and on the wings of the wind went outward and then down into the chasm. She ran forward swiftly, a hundred yards from the precipice's edge. She struck a match, stopped briefly, set it to the grass.

The flame caught, leaping up avidly, licking hungrily for more fuel, a demon for desire, newly born, yearning to rage a giant of destruction. The girl snatched a handful of the burning grass and ran with it a little farther forward, then to the side, scattering burning wisps as she went.

Everywhere that a spark fell it made of itself a blaze. Already, in twenty seconds, she had created a broad belt of flame that rose swiftly and spread to right and left.

About her everywhere the air grew stifling, hot, filled with smoke and ash and cinder so that as she ran her lungs began to hurt her. But she kept on. Nearer were the herds coming; Steve and his men had not been able to stem the mad torrent; not yet had they succeeded in turning it.

And in another handful of minutes the black, tight-jammed mass of big, panting bodies would be hurtling out into space. Unless she made her fire extend from side to side in a wall of leaping, roaring, swirling menace that would do what no men and horses could accomplish.

Terry was racing as never had Terry run before, her breath coming in choking sobs, her eyes shining wildly, her body shaken with the effort she put upon it. She had her burning barrier across the more dangerous end of the valley, where the cliffs dropped sheerest; she had but another few yards to go and there would be hope that she would succeed. But she must not stop yet, not yet.

She ran on toward the nearer rim of the valley, scattering burning wisps of grass as she went, her heart beating wildly, seeming ready to burst through her side. She fell, rose, ran on. She stood still a moment, turning her back to the fires of her own building, looking toward the upper end whence came the steady roar.

For an instant she stood fascinated. It looked as if the ground itself, in many a low-lying swell, were racing on to meet her. Then she saw the hundreds of horns glistening dully in the new light. That black mass, surging forward, was the herd and she was still in its path.

She cried out and threw down her last torch and ran just as the frightened steers were running, fear in her heart, racing away from death, just running for her life. She saw a form ahead of the others, breaking away from them, sweeping down upon her. She cried out in terror; then she knew and cried out again and threw up her arms and turned toward the rider who had remembered her and feared for her and come for her. And Steve, bending from his saddle, equal to the need of the moment, swept her up and caught her tight in his arm and rode out of the way of herd and fire.

FROM a little crag-crested knoll, standing hand in hand, their forms blended in silhouette against the dawn, they watched breathlessly the end of the stampede. The maddened brutes rushed on, straight toward Terry's barrier of flame. Then those in the van sought suddenly to alter their headlong courses.

Steve's face was white with anger as he saw the result. A full half-dozen, perhaps ten, big bodies at the fore passed through the far end of the flaming line, swept on, sought to swerve only at the last frantic moment with their fellows crowding them to the brink, and, struggling wildly, went over and down and out of sight. Terry shuddered.

The herd, however, broke, divided, swung to right and left and passed about the burning danger-signal and to the outer rims of the valley, achieving safety somewhere in

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the night, scattering, tossing their gleaming fronts, snorting and beginning to bellow their rage.

"If it hadn't been for you, Terry Temple——" Steve began, his voice a little hoarse.

"If it hadn't been for you, Steve Packard," laughed Terry a trifle unsteadily but quite happily, "where would I have been?"

And then, quite as if their destiny wished it made plain that not yet had the time come for them to devote themselves to themselves, Barbee rode down toward them, spurring through the last of the fleeing herd, shouting:

"There's a dozen men ridin' this way an' ridin' like ——! An' the firelight's shin' on their guns; every man's totin' one. An' it's ol' Hell-Fire Packard ridin' at their head."

"I'm glad he has come," muttered Steve heavily.

And then, as if he were uncertain of his return to her, he kissed Terry's lips that were lifted toward his. In a dull stupor, so much had she experienced these last few minutes, she watched him swing again to the back of a horse and ride to meet those who came. The very way he carried his rifle in front of him bespoke with rare eloquence his readiness for anything.

XXV

TERRY started, shook off her apathy with a sudden effort and called out:

"Steve! Steve! Come back!"

He had gone but a half-dozen paces. He swung about and returned to her. It was not light enough yet for her to see his eyes; they seemed just unfathomable, somber pools in the shadow of his hat-brim. As he turned his head a little, harking to the distant sounds of men's voices coming on, the rigid profile was harsh and implacable.

"Terry," he said sternly, "you mustn't ask me to come back again. I am just standing on my own rights this time, as a man must now and then. Old man Packard is over there. He is coming on. He wants trouble. He doesn't want the law-courts. He always preferred to play the game man to man. He has cost me a number of cattle; when I can figure just how many I am going over and collect from him —if we are both left alive, which is to be doubted. And now, if he wants fight——"

Again he glanced over his shoulder. Still she could not read what lay in his eyes. But a new, almost eager note, boyishly eager Terry thought in dismay, had burst into his voice—

"If he wants fight—by —— Terry Temple, I'm as much Packard as he is!"

She watched him wheel again and go. This time she did not call to him. Her little figure stiffened, her hands were down at her sides and clenched, her chin was lifted a little. The whole attitude was soldierlike.

"They are two of a kind," said Terry within herself. "They are men. They are Packards. I am proud and—and afraid—and— Oh, dear God! Dear God! Bring him back to me!"

She could hear Steve giving his brief orders crisply. Other figures loomed about him, coming out of the night and the shadows. There was young Yellow Barbee and Bandy Oliver; there was the Number Ten cowboy whom she knew only as "Spotty;" in a moment these and two or three other men were with Steve. Six or seven; possibly eight of them all told. And Barbee had said that there were about a dozen men with old man Packard.

"This is my fight, boys," Steve was saying. "Mine and my grandfather's. I want you fellows to keep out of it unless the boys with old man Packard mix in. If they do——"

"We're with you," said Yellow Barbee. "Huh, boys?"

And a little nervously and hurriedly they answered—

"Yes."

"Then," concluded Steve, "keep your eyes open. Hang back, now."

She saw him lean forward in the saddle, noted how the horse leaped under him, took anxious stock of the manner in which he carried his rifle. Then suddenly there came back into Terry's cheeks the good hot blood, into her eyes the sparkle and shine, into her heart something akin to the sheer joy of battle. Had she a horse she would not have hung back for want of a rifle but would have ridden after him, with him. As it was she cried out ringingly:

"God go with you, Steve Packard! I'm proud of you!"

She might not ride with him; at least she would not crouch and cringe and hide her eyes. She would watch him as he rode, watch him as he fought, watch him to the

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d even though he slipped from the saddle. So she made her way hastily to a point vantage, running the brief distance lying tween the slight knoll on which she stood d the eastern edge of the valley where e rugged peaks rose abruptly. She scramed up the first bit of slope, her heart ating wildly, expecting each second to ar the snap and crackle of rifle-fire. She rned and looked back; the floor of the lley was too uneven for her to have a eeping view.

She began climbing again. Great boulrs rose in her path; somehow she got t them and over them. Broken slabs of anite strewed the way; she made of them eps on which to mount higher and higher. ill no sound of a shot and at last, upon a rrow shelf of rock offering sufficient foothold, she stopped.

Here, with her back tight-pressed to a ck, her hands gripping at irregularities on ch side of her to steady her, she sent her uesting gaze down into Drop Off Valley.

Now she understood why there had as yet en no rifle-fire. The day, coming on owly, still offered more gloom than radiace but she could pick out two figures early. One was that of Steve. He had dden on ahead of his men, perhaps a hunred feet ahead, and was upon a bit of igher ground.

The other form, bulking big in the thin ght, was indisputably that of old man 'ackard. Like Steve, he had ridden on in dvance of his men. She could just make ut a dull mass yonder behind him which ight have been but a group of boulders ad not the impatient stirring showed where is horsemen were waiting.

It was very still there on the uplands in he dim dawning. In breathless watchfulness a few men behind Steve watched; a few nen behind old man Packard watched; a girl upon a granite peak watched. Down oward the lower end of the valley where the loor of the plateau dropped precipitously nto the steep-walled cañon the fire Terry ad set was still burning fiercely. But the wind carried its fury away from them, so hat it was only an evil whisper.

Here and there, elsewhere in the valley, the fires still burned on. There were wide stretches across which the flames had already swept so that now they were inkblack, burnt-out, smoking a little. Upon such an open space, still hot under their horses' hoofs, the two Packards, grandfather and grandson, came face to face. And they were stern, ominously set faces confronting each other.

At last they had pulled rein, both of them, looking grotesquely like clockwork mechanisms, being actuated by the same impulse at the same time. Some ten feet only were between their horses' tossing heads. They were almost opposite Terry's lookout and at no great distance. In the quiet pervading the valley their voices came to her. Not each word, but a word now and then, lifted above its fellows, and always the purport. For there was no mistaking the quality of the two voices.

Rage in old Packard was welcomed by wrath in young Packard. Heat and anger and explosive denunciation were to be looked for now. Never had it been the Packard way to temporize; always had it been the Packard way to leap in and strike. Few-worded always was the old man; as few-worded was the young man now.

"You are a —— scoundrel, sir!"

"You will draw your men off. You will pay for the damage Blenham has done."

"By ——, sir!"

There was little more said. That thunderous "By——, sir!" from the old man's lips carried to Terry where she stood tight-pressed against her rock. And then all unexpectedly and from an unexpected quarter, came the first rifle-shot.

The first shot and the second, close together. The bullets passed between grandfather and grandson, kicking up little puffs of dust beyond them. Neither looked to see whence the shots came. The thought was in each mind:

"Is this a Packard I am dealing with? Setting one of his hired assassins to shooting from a blind?"

The old man's rifle was thrown up before him; Steve's rose with it. Over yonder old Packard's men squared themselves in their saddles and made ready for grim work. Yellow Barbee gave a signal all unneeded to his men; his own rifle in his eager hands, was ready, the trigger yielding to his calloused forefinger.

AND then from the flinty spire of a peak rising between them and a sun that was slowly wheeling into the clear sky, came scream after scream that echoed and billowed across the open lands as

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Terry Temple, seeing something of the truth, cried out in terrified desperation and warning.

A girl's voice screaming— Old man Packard turned sharply and stared in wonderment. Terry's voice— Steve swung about, his anger suddenly quenched in alarm, his eyes seeking everywhere for her.

It was Barbee who saw her first. Barbee called out, a strange note in his voice, and clapped his spurs to his horse's sides and went racing across the undulating lands toward her. Then Steve saw and old man Packard and the rest. Saw but at first could not understand: the sun was just behind her, winking into their eyes. There was some one with her, struggling with her.

"Blenham!" shouted Steve.

And he was racing wildly along after Barbee, yearning to shoot to kill and yet not daring to shoot at all. Blenham and Terry struggling upon the iron side of the mountain, Terry striking and striking at him frantically, Blenham with his arms about her, dragging her back toward a wide fissure in the rocks, the sun bright above them.

To Terry it seemed that the universe had come crashing down about her ears. A moment ago, tense and rigid and breathless, she had stood watching two men face each other threateningly. Then there had been the crack of the unexpected, unseen rifle; the dust struck up between them; the second shot. And the smoking rifle-barrel was not three feet from where Terry stood, Blenham's convulsed face laid against the stock, Blenham's one evil eye lining the sight.

Almost on the instant she guessed something of the truth. Blenham in this light was not sure of hitting; he would be a fool to shoot and miss. Unless— And it was then that she screamed out her warning, then before he had so much as put out his hand toward her.

Unless Blenham, with all of the guile of him uppermost, knew that that shot fired between the two would send them flying at each other's throats, ending all parley and bringing about unthinkable tragedy. Blenham had his own reasons for what he did; certainly it would fit in with Blenham's plans to see the hand of a Packard set against a Packard.

But she had not thought to have him sieze her. Now his great, calloused, soiled, hairy hands shut down upon her, gripping her shoulders, jerking her from her place into the crevice from which his face had emerged. She fought, seeking to get the revolver in her blouse.

Blenham must have known that she kept it there. He snatched it and threw it behind him, cursed her and dragged her with him. As Barbee came on and Steve came just behind him the figures of Blenham and Terry were both gone as if the mountainside had split for them and closed after them.

"They've got in a hole," called out Barbee. "Them mountains is full of caves. They can't get away far."

As they went up the steep slope Barbee was still in the lead. He mounted to the shelf of rock on which Terry had been standing. He stepped into the crevice through which Blenham had dragged Terry.

"There's a split in the rocks here," called Barbee. "He went this way."

"Watch out for him!" warned Steve, now on the ledge close to the boy. "Let me go ahead!"

Barbee laughed.

"Long ago I told him I'd get him!"

Blenham had been waiting in a little rock-rimmed hollow. He shot from the hip, using a heavy revolver. Barbee stood a moment looking foolishly at the sky and slowly leaned back against the rock. Then he lurched and fell, twisting, spinning so that he lay half in the fissure, his rifle clattering to the ledge outside, his body falling so that his head and shoulders were across the rifle.

Steve stepped over Barbee's twitching body, alert, every nerve taut, his finger crooked to the trigger of his rifle. But again Blenham had withdrawn. In the little rudely circular hollow from which Blenham had fired point blank at Yelland Barbee was Terry's hat, trodden underfoot. Again it was as if the mountain had swallowed them an and the girl he had taken with him.

But a moment later Steve saw and understood. Not ten steps from where he stood was the mouth of a cave. Into it Blenham had retreated. In there was Blenham now; Blenham and Terry with him. And the way, for the moment at least, was securely blocked. Evidently here was a hangout known before, previously employed. It had a door made of heavy cedar slabs. The door was shut and, of course, barred from within.

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"Terry!" called Steve.

Terry sought to answer; he heard her ice in inarticulate terror, little more than gasp, choked back in her throat. Steve ent dead white. He visualized Blenham's nds upon her.

He came on to the door, his rifle clubbed. here was but the one thing to do; smash own the door and so come at Blenham the ortest, quickest, only way.

Then Blenham called to him for the first me.

"Fool, are you, Steve Packard? Look at hat door. Don't you know before you can tter it down I can pick you off! An' I n do more'n that!"

As if he had cruelly drawn it from her here came again Terry's scream. Steve orang forward and struck at the heavy edar planks. And Blenham called out gain:

"Maybe you can break your way in; here's enough of you. But, by ——, you'll nd her dead when the door falls!"

Steve had again lifted his rifle. Now he et it sink slowly so that the butt came to est gently upon the rock at his feet. Blenam held the high hand; Blenham was unhinkably vile; Blenham was desperate. And Terry, his little Terry on whom Blenham had always looked with the eye of a brute and a beast, was in there, just beyond hree inches of solid seasoned cedar planking.

"If you harm her in the least——" It was Steve's voice though certainly at first neither Blenham nor even Terry could have recognized it. "If you harm her in the east, Blenham, I'll kill you. Not all at once—just by inches!"

Blenham answered him coolly.

"I know when I've lost a trick, Steve Packard. This ain't the firs' one an' it ain't goin' to be the last. I've played 'em high an' I always knowed I took chances. But I'm playin' safe! Get me? Safe!"

"Go ahead; what do you mean?"

"Ol' man Packard is down there. This girl's yellin' spoiled my play. By now he has learned a thing or two. All right; that's jus' the run of luck, —— rotten luck!"

Under the words the restraint was gone and his rage flared out briefly. But it was patent that Blenham's shrewdness was still with him. He continued almost calmly:

"You an' him can have two words together. Then come back here an' give me your promises, both of you, to let me go. Then I'll let her go. Otherwise, I'm as good as dead—an' so's she. I'll jam a gun to her head the las' thing an' blow her brains out. An', what's more, I'll get one or two of you besides before you drop me."

INTO their parley, interrupting it, his eyes flaming, his face hot with anger, mounted old man Packard.

"Stephen," he said sternly, his eyes hard on his grandson's face, "tell me an' tell me the downright truth, so help you God: Did you rent this pasture from Andy Sprague, thinkin' he owned it?"

Though he wondered, Steve answered briefly, to have this done with so that he could again turn to Blenham—

"Yes."

"An' the boys says you have been losin' stock an' blamin' it to me? An' that you've had stock poisoned an' shot? An' blamed it to me?"

"Yes," said Steve.

"So've I," said the old man heavily. "An' I've always blamed it to you. An' I never sold to Andy Sprague. Him an' Blenham—Blenham has played us both ways for suckers, has stole enough cows from one an' another——"

His voice was swept up into the roar of rage which had given him his name of the old mountain-lion of the north. He came stepping over poor Barbee's body, thrusting by Steve, towering over the door of the cave.

"Hold back," commanded Steve queerly. "He's in there. But he's got it on us. We've got to promise to let him go!"

"Let him go!" shouted the old man, his big bulk seeming actually to quiver with rage. "After all he's done, let him go? By the Lord, Stephen Packard, if you're that sort of a man——"

"She is in there with him," said Steve heavily. "Terry is in there. Don't you see?"

"Terry? That Temple girl? What have we to do——"

"In the first place," cried Steve sharply, "she's a girl and he's a brute. In the second place she is the next Mrs. Packard and I won't have Blenham pawing her over!"

His grandfather stared at him, long and keenly. Then he turned away and called out commandingly—

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"Blenham, come out of that!"

Blenham jeered at him.

"And be shot down like a dog? There's a girl in here, Packard. Young Packard is gone on her; he wants to marry her. An' unless you an' him give your word to let me go, I'm goin' to jam a gun at her head an' blow her brains out. An' I'll get him as I come out; an' I'll get you."

"Let him go!" called Terry faintly. "Let him go, Steve! Oh, dear God—if you love me——"

"Come out, Blenham!" shouted Steve. "I give you my word, so help me God, to let you go scot-free. Come out!"

"Not so fast," mocked Blenham, lingering over his high card. "You've got to promise for your men; you've got to send 'em across the valley. You've got to have a horse handy for me to ride. You've got to back down the valley yourse'f. An' ol' man Packard has got to do the same."

Old man Packard roared out his curses, but in the end, seeing nothing else to do, he went grumbling down the rocky slope, back to his horse and to his men. But first he had known perhaps the supreme humiliation of his life. He had said:

"Blenham, on my word of honor as a Packard an' a gentleman, I'll let you go. An' I'll make my men let you go."

And there were actually tears hanging to his lashes as he swung again into his saddle.

"He has not hurt you, Terry?" asked Steve before he too would go down the slope.

"No," cried Terry. "No, no! But—— Oh, hurry, hurry, Steve. I feel that I'll smother, I'll die!"

From down in the valley they watched, close to a score of hard-eyed, wrath-filled men, as Blenham stepped out of the crevice and on to the ledge. They saw how he jeered as he stepped over the body of the man he had shot.

"A fool was Barbee," he called. "A fool the Packards, ol' an' young!"

They saw him come down the slope, carrying himself with a swaggering air of braggadocio but plainly watchful and suspicious. Terry had come out upon the ledge and she too watched him. He came down swiftly and swung up into the saddle of the horse they had left for him.

And now at last his suspicion was passed. His triumph broke out like a streak of evil light.

"I was ready to go," he called, "any time!"

He swung his arm out toward the blue hills of old Mexico.

"Down there——"

Barbee, whom they had thought dead, stirred a little where he lay. The rifle under him he thrust forward six inches.

"Blenham!" he called weakly.

Blenham swung about and fired, again from the hip. But he had fired hastily. Barbee's rifle, resting upon the rock, was steady. Between its muzzle and Blenham's broad chest there was but the brief distance of some fifty feet. The report of Barbee's rifle, the thin upcurling smoke under the new sun—these were the chief matters in all the world for their little fragment of time.

Then Blenham threw out his arms and pitched forward. His foot caught in the stirrup. The frightened horse was plunging, running, dragging a man whose body was whipped this way and that.

"I promised—a long time ago," whispered Barbee, "that I'd get you, Blenham."

XXVI

"GUY LITTLE!"

The old man's voice boomed out mightily as the old man himself strode back and forth impatiently in the big barn-like library of his ranch home. Guy Little appeared with a promptness savoring either of magic or prepared expectancy.

"You rang, your Majesty?"

"Rang, be ——!" shouted old Packard. "I hollered my ol' head off. What's the day of the week, Guy Little?"

"It's Wednesday, your ——"

"An' what's the day of the month?"

"It's the nineteenth, your ——"

"Then tell me, sir," and the old man's tone was angry and challenging to a remarkable degree, "why in the name of the devil my gran'son, Stephen, ain't showed up yet?"

Guy Little might have remarked that it was rather early to expect any one to show up. It was not yet six o'clock of a morning which promised to be one of the very finest mornings ever known. The old man had, as Guy Little expressed it, "been prancin' an' pawin' aroun'," for an hour.

Guy Little grinned like any cherub.

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"He has showed up," he chuckled, though he had meant to hold back the tidings teasingly. "He come in late las' night. You was asleep an' sleepin' soun', so ——"

"He did, did he?" bellowed the old man. "Crept in like a —— thief in the night, did he? Well, where is he now? Sleepin' yet, I'll be bound. When he ought to be up an' —— Why, when I was a young devil his age——"

"He's outside somewhere," said Guy Little. "He has been down to the crick for a mornin' dip, I'd guess, your Majesty."

"Why would you guess that?"

"Because pretty near all he had on was a towel an' a —a sort of a —— immodes' britch-cloth," explained Guy Little confidentially.

"An'," continued old man Packard, "where's—she?"

"Meanin' the Fairy Queen, your majesty?" Guy Little's voice was now a whisper.

"Meanin' her—the Fairy Queen," said the old man gently. "Sleepin', Guy Little? I won't have her woke!"

"Woke, your eye-brow!" chuckled Guy Little. "I'd say she's gone for a—a dip, too, your Majesty. An'—an', between just the two of us ol' fellers, hers is —— near as immodes' as his! Fact, an' I don't care whose granddaughter she is. Blue, you know: an' not very much of it. An' a red cap. An—I couldn't see very well through the curtain's an' I dasn't let 'em know I was lookin'. Only don't you let her know we know why, bless her little simple heart, she ain't got the least idea how pretty an'—an' —— immodes' ——"

Old man Packard fixed him with a knowing eye.

"Ain't she?" he demanded. "Ain't she, Guy Little? Why, if there's one thing in this world worth knowin' that my granddaughter don't know —— Go order breakfas' ready in two shakes, Guy Little."

"I did," said Guy Little. "It's ready already. There they come. Happy-lookin', ain't they? Like a couple kids."

"An' see that them two new saddle-horses is ready right after breakfas' for 'em, Guy Little."

"They're ready now," chuckled Guy Little. "I remembered."

"An'—an' she likes——"

"Flowers on the table? An' her grapefruit stacked high with sugar? An' the coffee with hot milk? Don't I know nothin' a-tall, Packard?"

Steve and Terry, dripping and laughing, breaking into a run as they came on across the meadow, spied the big man and the little at the window and shouted a joyous good morning and Terry threw them a kiss apiece. And old man Packard, his hands on his hips, a look of absolute, ineffable content in his eyes, said softly:

"I've made a mistake or two in my life, Guy Little. But ain't I lived long enough to squeeze in a blunder or so here an' there? An' I've made a mistake a time or two on a man."

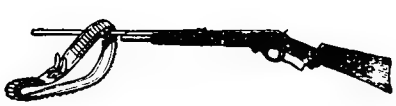
"Blenham did fool you pretty slick," suggested Guy Little.

"But," went on the old man hurriedly, "I know a real, upstandin', thoroughbred——"

"Fairy Queen of a woman."

"Fairy Queen of a woman when I see her. An' that little thing out there, her eyes shinin' like I ain't seen a pair of eyes shine for more'n fifty year, Guy Little—why, sir, she's what I call a —— good Packard."

THE END



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Salvage

by Henry Leverage

Author of "Uncharted," "Assignats," etc.

DRIVING hard from north to south, the deep-water wrecking-tug *Cyclops* was logging better than eleven knots.

Blue-arched the sky, save for fleecy patches which were scurrying before the east wind. The low menace of the Atlantic free-board showed over the tug's starboard quarter. Ahead, somewhere, lay storied Diamond Shoal and the Hatteras Light-Ship.

Micky McMasters stood within the ornate and stanch pilot-house of the *Cyclops*. "Red" Landyard, his mate, was aloft where showed a single derrick-mast supporting a narrow, canvas-built crow's-nest. Mike Monkey, a half-Scotch and half-Irish engineer, attended to the quadruple-expansion marine engines of the fast-flying tug.

A radio message, caught three days before, had told of a rich prize drifting at the mercy of wind and weather above Hatteras. The owners of the tug had frantically given at least three positions, each based on the reports of navigators who had sighted the derelict through the rifts of a coast storm.

When you have steamed and sailed upon the termagant ocean for twenty years without laying aside any money for shore days, the mention of a ship-load of Turkish tobacco and goods in bales from the Orient drifting around is enough to excuse any effort. Micky McMasters was determined to find the derelict or take to chicken-farming on Long Island.

Square-jawed; aggressive, though undersized, the little skipper was the proper figure of a seaman. His fists were broken; his torn pea-jacket had seen better days; his hair was graying over his temples. Despite these handicaps, his eyes were keen and deep-thatched.

He watched the Yankee mate in the crow's-nest for some sign of success. The highest coign of vantage on the tug should be the place to raise the derelict. Already the sky was flushed with the first spears of the sunset. The curdy roll of the surf on the shore showed over a tossing waste of green water. It would soon be time to starboard the tug and drive out into the Atlantic. McMasters waited one bell and then leaned toward the wheelman.

"Ten, east," he said sadly. "'Old 'er at one 'undred and sixty."

"A hundred an' sixty, sir," was the answer as the bow of the *Cyclops* swung away from the green water and dipped into blue waves which cascaded over the blunt stem and showered the plate glass of the pilot-house windows.

A wind from the dying storm cut three points over the port bow. It worked up a choppy sea, through which the stanch tug found difficult going. The light faded from the sky. The stars showed through the clouds. They disappeared and left

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one great beacon close down by the horizon—Hatteras Light-Ship.

Red Landyard appeared at the port door of the pilot-house. He thrashed his arms and stared, first at the binnacle over the wheelman's shoulder and then into the little captain's anxious eyes.

"Nothing," he said. "I raised nothing. No use staying up there any longer. We went right over the last position reported."

"The drift is southerly. We better hold her here, skipper, under easy steam. I'll take the watch first thing in the morning."

"Maybe the *Mamora* has sunk."

"Hardly, skipper. She's here, or hereabouts. I'd say a bit to the south'ard."

McMasters pressed his nose to a side port-hole glass and peered out. He started to button his pea-jacket for a turn on the deck when the after door opened to a crack and then wide. The first engineer glided into the pilot-house.

"Did ye ring for reduced speed?" he asked as he fluttered a pale pair of eyelashes toward the skipper.

McMasters clamped his jaws shut and glared at Mike Monkey.

"No, I did not ring," he said through his teeth.

"But ye was going to?"

"'Ow did you know that?"

"Ain't there a derelict ahead? Ah heard a coal-passer say something about one. He was standing at the head of the gratings by the galley-house when Ah heard him say that."

The little skipper thrust the engineer aside and jerked open the starboard door. He was followed by Red Landyard. The two men climbed over the towing-hawsers and other litter of the deck and lifted themselves upon the forepeak, which was open and wave-swept. They strained their eyes.

They saw nothing for a long minute. Then, and guided by a faint sound, they distinguished a white line of leaping waves through the gloom. Two stumps of masts lifted above the sea. A canted deck came out of the mist. Atop this deck was a low cabin upon which crouched a dog.

"Good God!" exclaimed the Yankee mate. "See! We are heading to cut right through the wreck."

Micky McMasters leaped from the forepeak and dashed aft. He was just in time to change the course of the tug.

THE *Cyclops* sheered from the drifting menace and plunged by its stern. The wheelman brought the tug to slow headway and came around so that the stanch wrecking-craft lay broadside to the derelict.

"Hit's not the *Mamora*," said Micky as he hurriedly joined the mate on the forepeak. "That's a small coaster."

Red Landyard squinted his splendid eyes. He steadied himself and leaned out over the waves as he grasped the stout shank of an anchor davit.

"Schooner," he said laconically. "Lumber-schooner, abandoned. She's waterlogged and full of lumber—hardly worth salvaging. See, the long-boat is gone from the deck-house. They got away from her and left a dog."

A howl sounded across the gap of sea between the *Cyclops* and the derelict. The animal on the deck-house rose and began barking pathetically. Its hair was dripping wet. Its paws started scraping the planks, on the verge of leaping into the ocean.

"St. Bernard or collie," the mate said. "We'll have to leave it, skipper. It's the only thing alive on that schooner."

Micky stared at the dark sky. He mentally took note of the wind and the direction of the fast-running waves. He braced himself as the *Cyclops* dipped, squirmed and plunged her stout stem into fathoms of green sea.

The two seamen emerged from their ducking. The dog scratched the planks and barked mournfully. The distance between the tug and the waterlogged schooner increased as the helmsman starboarded the *Cyclops*.

"There it comes!" shouted the astonished mate. "See, skipper, the dog is gone from the deck-house. It's swimming toward us."

Micky motioned for the wheelman to steady the tug. He got down on his knees and peered over the waves. He saw the shaggy mane and lifted nose of the dog. It was paddling frantically.

"Gorblime!" exclaimed the little skipper. "'Ere comes a friend."

The mate shook his head. The position of the tug was precarious. Any moment might find the white fangs of the shoals under her keel. The wind was on shore and had decreased but little in violence.

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Mickey leaped from the forepeak and landed upon a coil of seven-inch hemp. He rebounded and dashed for the wheel-house. To the helmsman he snapped:

"Port a little! Give 'er quarter speed. I want to save that dog."

"Ah've noo doot ye are crazy," said Mike Monkey. "We're on a lee shore, mon!"

The little skipper shot a swift glance at the first engineer. He hurried out through the side door and crept along the stanch rail until he was abreast of the schooner's position. He saw the speck-like dog rising and falling with the waves. He reached down and called encouragingly. He held out his hand as he grasped the end of a line.

The St. Bernard came closer. It struggled and closed the distance. Its claws scraped the tug's stout planks. It was thrown back by a seething comber. Its eyes called mutely upon the skipper.

Micky rose to his full height and threw off his pea-jacket and cap. He bent one end of the line around his chest with a running bowline, threw a double hitch over a belaying-pin, and leaped into the sea like a lean seal from an ice-floe.

The mate drew him back after he had grasped the St. Bernard's collar. He waited until the rail of the tug dipped and then came up and on to the slippery deck with the animal in his arms. The sucking sea reached in vain. The wind swirled and milled. The high-engined salvage-boat dashed out to open sea as the dog licked the skipper's cold hand.

Micky led the animal to the warmth of the wheel-house. It was too dark there to examine the name on the collar, so he opened the door leading to the chart-room and half-cabin and passed through this to the ladder leading down to the engine-room.

Mike Monkey stood at the foot of the ladder. He grinned as he saw the little skipper grasp the wet St. Bernard and lift it to the cove of his right arm.

"Ah've no room for pests in this place," he rasped. "Ayr ye going to store it with us?"

Micky lowered the dog to the engine-room gratings and wheeled upon the engineer.

"'Vast with you!" he snapped. "This dog stays with the *Cyclops*—for good luck. Get 'im a bite to eat. 'E looks 'ungry."

Mike Monkey bent and placed his hands on the knees of his greasy overalls. He stared at the dog, whose tail was wagging like the flipper of a small walrus.

"Name's Jocko," he said after a close squint at the brass-studded collar. "They ought to have called him Waif of th' Sea. He's salvage, he is."

"Get hit some food!"

Mike Monkey went aft, squeezed by the four cylinders of the flashing engine and returned with two dry biscuits.

He tossed them down at the dog's feet.

The animal glanced at Micky McMasters, shook himself, spattered water over the first engineer, then devoured the biscuits with a famished, double gulp.

"Gorblime!" exclaimed the pleased skipper. "It ain't 'ad a bite to eat since the storm started. They ought to keel-'awl the men who left that animal behint. 'E must 'ave been 'ard-'e'arted."

"Where was th' schooner from?" asked Mike Monkey as the dog crept close up to the little skipper's legs and began to nose his boots.

"She was the *Robert Goodwin* out of Newport News. I figure the cap'n made for the Capes in the long-boat. They did dirt when they left the dog."

Mike Monkey nodded and shifted a chew from one cheek to the other. He bent his head and listened to the heavy on-shore seas that beat upon the forward planks of the *Cyclops*.

"A wild night," he predicted. "Wot with th' engines doin' double duty an' racin', Ah ha'e no doot we're in for it. Ah'll put th' collie in a spare bunker."

"You'll not! Let it dry off in the boiler room an' then I'll carry it up to the chart-house. It may be all I'll ever get out of these seas."

The dog stood at the foot of the ladder as the skipper started upward. It raised itself and sat on its haunches, his forepaws pressed to its ears. A low whine sounded. Micky glanced down.

"Come on," he whispered.

The dog began climbing the slippery rounds. It reached the top as Mike Monkey backed against the second intermediate cylinder in astonishement.

"Ye ha'e charmed him!" cried the engineer.

Micky wound an arm around the dog's neck and brushed back the long hair from its eyes. The dog looked at him gratefully.

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"Good dog," he said. "You're goin' to be hour mascot! Maybe you'll bring us some luck out o' the graveyard of the Atlantic."

"It'll eat us out o' house an' home," prophesied Mike Monkey as he ducked beneath the low sill of the stoke-hole door.

THE *Cyclops* reached deep sea and blue water before midnight. She was held under easy cruising-speed with her stanch nose full in the curling waves that dashed at her in vain.

Micky made the rounds of the tug. He saw that two lookouts were posted forward, one on the forecastle deck and the other in the crow's-nest. He slanted a keen glance at the sea and then at the clouds before he started aft.

The dog followed him silently. He peered in at the wheel-house where the quartermaster hung over the spokes. He passed through the wireless room and the half cabin, half chart-room. He emerged with the trailing dog at the galley-house, where two deck-hands were chinning with the cook.

He stood braced to the wind and stared astern. A faint glow, seen over the wave-tops, marked the location of Diamond Shoal. No other light was strong enough to penetrate the mist.

The dog sat down on the wet, rocking deck with its eyes fixed upon the little skipper. It whined once in sympathy. Micky's hand dropped to its head. He patted the animal, although his heart was heavy. There was scant chance of raising the derelict which had brought the *Cyclops* rushing out of New York harbor.

A given position on the ocean always carried with it the knowledge that the surface was never still. Currents, tides, winds—all had a hand in shaping the destiny of a wreck. It might have sunk. It was more than probable that the *Mamora* had been driven ashore somewhere along the Atlantic free-board.

The cockney skipper shrugged his shoulders, after a last long glance, and started forward along the galley-house which was part of the chart-room and cabin. The stanch tug had been built for deep-sea work. She was one of the safest craft in the world for her tonnage. She was over-engined and sheathed with green wood. Her windows, port-holes and hatches were of double thickness. Her hawsers, both fore and aft, were sufficently strong to tow a cruiser, and her bitts and winches were built into the deck timbering.

Mike Monkey was in the wheel-house as McMasters, followed by the dog, entered through the starboard door.

The engineer was doing nothing more pressing than squinting through a forward port-hole at the side of the front windows.

He turned and blinked his eyes at the skipper. His glance dropped to the dog. The animal backed away and rubbed against the little skipper's legs.

"Where's Mr. Landyard?" asked the engineer.

"'E turned in, where you ought to be. We're goint to 'ave a rough morning, Mike. There's a long swell on the sea. That means the tail of another storm. Like as not we're booked to go back to New York about noon. They're liable to radio us any minute."

"Who?"

"McGovern and Sterne—the owners."

"Then ye have given up the idea of findin' the Turkish ship with all that tobacco? Ah need tobacco!"

"She may 'ave foundered. She was abandoned by 'er crew, who reported a leak aft an' only the fore'old 'olding."

"That's twa wrecks where the crews quit. The ither was the schooner where ye got the dog."

Micky glanced down at Jocko.

"It looks," he said sadly, "as if this is all we'll get out of old ocean. It's a fine pet for me when I go to chicken-farming over Long Island way. I'd say the dog weighed five stone. That's about right for a young St. Bernard."

Mike Monkey turned toward the port-hole and pressed his nose against the cold glass. He sucked as a wave curled the bow and broke against the pilot-house. He shivered and drew away.

"Chicken-farming is a gentleman's game," he remarked dryly.

"Wot are we getting out o' th' sea but misery an' meanness?"

"A dog," said Micky.

"That's wot Ah meant! The sea's all right for square-headed Germans an' dogs, but it's——on men. Ah resign when we get to port!"

Micky followed the first engineer into the chart-room. He stood undecided as

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Mike Monkey vanished through the companionway. He sat down at a well-braced desk and drew out a chart-roll, from which he extracted a hydrographer's tracing of the waters around Hatteras. He heard, as he pored over this chart, the dog sniffing around the sheathing of the room. It finally came to his side and lay down with its paws thrust between his legs.

He marked his present position with the point of a badly chewed lead-pencil. He traced drifts and currents. The probability he arrived at was that the derelict had foundered despite three reports to the contrary.

Rising, after rolling up the chart and replacing it in the tube, he strode aft and turned into the narrow door of his cabin. He heard the steady clamp of the engines. He caught the grating of a shovel upon the iron aprons of the stoke-hole, where two Scotch marine boilers were located. He listened intently to the whine of the rising wind and the hiss of the sea alongside the stanch tug. Then he turned in and slept, with the dog curled beneath his bunk.

The galley-boy awoke him before sunrise, which was the order he had left. He stared at the telltale compass over his head. The course was 150 degrees, or SE. by S. The *Cyclops* was laboring in a cross-sea. A gale had arrived from out of old ocean and was blowing on-shore with the shriek of a tempest.

Micky rolled from his bunk and glanced around for his shoes. He felt the cold nose of the dog touch his right foot. Reaching down, he patted it and said:

"Hon watch, eh? You're a good pup if you don't bring no luck!"

DAWN appeared soon after the little skipper had eaten a hasty breakfast washed down with three cups of strong coffee. He ordered the galley-boy to fetch biscuits and meat for the dog. He watched the dog eat and then whistled for it to follow him out upon the narrow deck.

A wild waste of crisscrossed waters rimmed the world. The sun struggled to view, then was suddenly swallowed by a dark mass of clouds. The *Cyclops* pointed her bow toward the center of a caldron. Astern lay Hatteras and Diamond Shoal—too far away to be seen from the deck.

Micky grasped the dog's neck and led it along the deck until he reached the open space before the great bay of the wheel-house. He raised his eyes and saw Red Landyard perched in the canvas crow's-nest.

The Yankee's elbows were bent. His eyes were peering through the small ends of a pair of high-diameter binoculars. He swept the tossing horizon. Suddenly he stiffened and threw back his head. Micky became keenly conscious that the mate had raised something. He spread his legs and rolled with the motion of the tug. It was a short minute before the mate lowered the binoculars and glanced down at the deck. A smile wreathed his homely features as he locked glances with the little skipper.

"Well, we've found her," he drawled. "Yon she is, cap'n, two points off the starboard bow. Better port helm and drive down. It's a derelict all right."

Micky asked no questions. He turned and hurried to the pilot-house.

"Port, twenty-five!" he called through the half-open door. "Steady it there!"

He glided back and stood directly under the crow's-nest.

Red Landyard focused the glasses, then snapped them shut.

"Luck is with us!" he shouted as he swayed half-across the sky. "She's the *Mamora* all right! Two funnels and 'way down aft."

"Hany ships standin' by?"

"Nope! She's a mass of foam and smother. She's drifting to the shoals. It won't be three hours before she strikes."

Micky glared at the sea. The waves had been raised to small mountains overnight. The course of the *Cyclops* was calculated to cause almost any mariner concern. A cross-sea buffeted the tug's bow, while running combers lifted over her port waist and dashed as high as the squat funnel.

The dog crept to the wet lee rail and rested its chin on the combing. Micky watched the animal. He shouted as he started aft toward the wheel-house. Jocko followed him and scampered to shelter.

"Ring for three-quarters speed!" the skipper told the quartermaster. "Let Mike shake those engines! We're in sight of millions!"

"The derelict, sir?"

"She's ahead—not more than five miles!

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Red raised 'er. 'Old your course—pull down that window so you can take the mate's orders. Watch, Mr. Landyard!"

Micky passed through the chart-room and staggered into the galley.

"All 'ands on deck!" he called. "Get hinto sou'westers an' oilskins. It's goint to be blyme wet from now on!"

Mike Monkey appeared at the top of the engine-room ladder. He stared at the dog and then raised his eyes toward Micky. He fluttered his eyelids. He shifted a mammoth chew of Navy tobacco.

"Ye look like a marine," he said.

"Get below!" Micky snapped. "Kick some speed on those engines. You're goint to 'ave a tow pretty soon. You better look well to your fires."

"They'll poach eggs now," grinned the pleased engineer as he disappeared like a jack going into a box.

Micky listened and heard satisfying sounds from the stoke-hole.

Shrieking wind and baffled seas marked the progress of the stanch tug toward the wave-buffeted derelict. The entire world of waters seemed to revolve. A storm was passing somewhere out to sea, its tail brushing the coast like a comet's. Warning-flags were undoubtedly flying from Sandy Hook to Knight's Key.

Micky strode to the deck and crouched in the lee of the cabin. He grasped the rungs of a light ladder that led to the top of the galley and a small shelter on the pilot-house. He narrowed his eyes as the dog pressed against his legs.

The derelict was marked by a yeast of foaming sea. One spar showed close by two funnels. The stern was under the surface. The high bow seemed a knife held edged against its enemies.

"Come, Jocko," said Micky. "We'll go hup!"

The little skipper started climbing the ladder. He glanced down and saw the dog attempting to follow him. He reached out his hand and caught the animal by the collar. He tugged and fell over backward to the boat-deck of the *Cyclops*.

The two crawled forward and crouched behind a low, canvas windbreak. Red Landyard loomed over them, not more than thirty feet away. The mate turned now and then and signaled to the quartermaster through the half-opened window.

Micky shouted assuringly and studied the derelict. He strained his glance in fear of sighting some moving object on the wave-washed deck. He rose finally, glared aft, and then called to five seamen who stood in the stern of the tug.

"Come forrard, you all! I want one of you to swim over to the wreck. Which of you is willing?"

The seamen crept along the narrow deck and appeared upon the fore-hatch of the *Cyclops*. They turned and stared at the derelict.

The high seas leaped and combed between the two ships. A tidal race kept the *Cyclops* well away from the wreck. Micky glanced at the squad below him, then braced himself by clutching a funnel-stay and spreading his legs.

It was with difficulty that the helmsman of the tug held the bow to the wind and waves. The starboard quarter was opposite the port waist of the *Mamora*. The position was maintained as the distance gradually decreased.

"Break hout a light line!" shouted Micky. "Get a two-inch Manila! One of you swim over!"

The five seamen shook their heads. They pointed toward the derelict. Its drift with the wind and the tug's forging ahead, due to the thrust of the single screw, promised to lay the *Cyclops* across the *Mamora's* bows.

McMasters studied the wave-swept derelict. The gangway was down on the port side. Its grating was under the sea. A wet ladder showed leading to the rail at the waist. A splume of sea-water shot upward, dashed over the deck-houses and funnels and cascaded astern. The wind milled and whipped the surface of the ocean with sudden energy. The stanch tug threatened to crash into the wreck.

"Sheer away!" exclaimed Micky over the edge of the pilot-house. "Keep your distance! Look hout!"

Red Landyard started climbing down the derrick-mast from the crow's-nest. "I'll swim over with a line!" he said. "Somebody's got to do it."

Micky heard the dog whine at his feet. He glared for a second time at the cautious seamen who had felt the wet sting of the driving seas that came over the *Cyclops's* bow.

"Come on, Jocko!" he snapped. "We'll go over an' show these muckers."

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THE Atlantic took up the challenge as the little skipper stripped off his boots and pea-jacket, snatched a line from the deck-rail and bent it around his chest, after descending to the foredeck.

A towering sea lifted the tug, dashed it toward the derelict and then dropped it down into a blue vale where the *Mamora* loomed high overhead. The motion was reversed. The tug was on a crest and the derelict in a hollow. The drift toward the Shoal became noticeable. The white fangs of a lee shore showed through the spindrift and smother.

Micky dropped overside and started swimming toward the gangway of the freighter. He struck out with all the strength of his short arms. He turned and felt the line dragging behind him. He saw the far-off tug and the St. Bernard crouching at the rail forward of the pilothouse. Again he turned and started swimming. It was almost useless. The drag of the two-inch rope, although it was new and floated, was pulling him down. He cast it off over his head and started unhampered for the dripping gangway.

The struggle almost finished him. He was on the point of giving up a number of times. The sea was cold and hostile. The brine stung his eyes and caused him to close them. He rolled over, trod water, then turned back again. He reached the cold steps of the gangway and was dashed against the derelict's rusting side. He crawled up and on to the wave-swept deck. Resting at the rail, he turned and stared toward the *Cyclops*.

It held its distance for a long minute, then dropped astern of the *Mamora* and came around on the lee side. Micky crossed the deck and saw Red Landyard swinging a weighted cord. He watched the splendid throw into the wind. The sinker on the end of the line missed the ship by many fathoms. The *Cyclops* passed and dropped back to the windward position as the screw was reversed.

Again the Yankee mate tried the swing with the lead-weighted line. It missed. Micky crawled up the slippery deck and climbed to the towering forepeak of the freighter. He gripped an anchor-davit and waited for the mate's third toss.

A wild wind milled out of the east. It lifted the seas and dashed their tops over the *Mamora*. A lee coast showed with one lip-like line of creamy water.

The mate's third attempt was no better than the second. The *Cyclops* drew ahead of the derelict. It came back as the seas gripped its port counter and tossed it like a chip in a maelstrom.

Micky dashed the salty tears from his stinging eyes. He stared through the mist and saw the St. Bernard crouched on the foredeck of the tug.

The little skipper motioned with his hand. He tried to point toward the dog. He shouted and found his words flung back at him.

There seemed no way of getting a line aboard the derelict. The stanch tug would be crushed like an egg-shell if it came in contact with the rusty sheer of the *Mamora*. The shoal water menaced. Already Micky thought he heard the pounding of the stern on the sands of Hatteras.

He climbed upon the capstan and steadied himself. He motioned to the dog for a second time. Then the mate seemed to grasp the situation. He dropped to the deck the lead he had been swinging, placed his foot over the line and jerked. He bent over the dog and fastened a swift knot to its collar.

"Go, Jocko!" he commanded. "Go to the Old Man standing there."

McMasters called, and this time, due to a shift of the wind, his voice was heard on the tug. The dog stood erect, whined, stared at the sea, then sprang over the rail of the *Cyclops* and started swimming with the light line floating behind him.

Micky sprang from the capstan and staggered aft. He crept down the rungs of the slippery gangway ladder. He waited and called to the dog.

A huge wave swung from the ocean and curled between the derelict and the tug. It drove the St. Bernard a full fathom under its blue crest. It passed and left a gulf in the ocean. Out of this gulf the dog emerged, shook its shaggy mane and came on grandly, with the light line sagging behind its fluke-shaped tail.

"Come on, Jocko!" screamed the cockney skipper. "'Ere you har! Right 'ere! That's a good dog. Now, look hout!"

Micky reached, felt the collar slip from his numbed fingers and groaned as the dog disappeared beneath the gangway platform.

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grasped the rope hand-rail and searched depths. He set his jaw as the St. ard rose to the surface and started iming with almost blinded eyes.

cko heard the little skipper's cheerful e, and turned with a sweep of its d tail and came paddling in his direc-

This time he got a strong grip on the r, waited until the seas steadied, then ed backward.

he dog and the dangling line came on of the grating. Micky waved his arm ard the tug. He started up the ladder Jocko close behind him. He reached deck and untied the knot about the ar, then started forward and scrambled n the forecastle deck.

ed Landyard and Mike Monkey had ady bent a two-inch Manila hawser to line. McMasters hauled this over intervening distance, hitched it around capstan and signaled for a towing-le. He pointed aft as the tug came adside the derelict. He motioned to-d the largest coil on the stern of the *lops*. This was a six-inch steel cable ed with a pelican hook.

Micky had already examined the capstan the *Mamora*. It could be operated by man. He found a bar floating with wreckage of the foredeck and started rping the heavy steel cable aboard the elict. It was a half-hour before he und up all the two-inch Manila rope d felt the pelican hook grate over the w. He finished the job with a bower-ain and an extra shackle to a fore tt.

The *Cyclops* started ahead and played t the towing-cable until the strain ought the bow of the *Mamora* full into e seas. The fang-like shoal over which e waves dashed was not more than a arter-mile astern of the freighter when licky felt the first slow surge forward. e waved his hands, sprang to the deck nd gathered the St. Bernard to his reast.

"You're only a big pup," he sobbed, but I'd 've perished on the reef if you adn't brought that line to me."

The dog barked with joy. The little kipper brushed his eyes and started to-ward the half-submerged galley-house of he derelict.

He crawled through a shattered port-hole and emerged with a box of biscuits and a ham. He offered both to the dog. He braced his short legs and watched the St. Bernard eat.

"A good pup," he said feelingly. "We've a 'alf-million of salvage under us an' an ocean of room—if the tow-line don't snap."

The dog barked and finished the biscuits. They both went forward and climbed to the forepeak. A wild waste of waters stretched to the dark horizon. The *Cyclops*, with steam pluming from the pipe aft its funnel, was plowing north and east. Red Landyard had let out cable enough to allow both craft to ride on successive waves or hollows between the crests. He was walking the *Mamora* toward Newport News and the Capes at the steady rate of five knots an hour. Greater speed would have jeopardized their chances for salvage.

ALL that dark day and the night that followed was spent in towing the *Mamora* to anchorage. The *Cyclops* carried in addition to her side lights two foremast lights and a small sheltered lantern astern for Micky to steer by. He had found that the derelict answered to a hand-wheel on the wave-washed bridge. The work was hard and almost useless, as the freighter towed nearly as well without a helm of any kind.

Staggering over the ocean on the second morning, a pilot-boat appeared and ranged alongside the derelict. Micky climbed out of the wheel-house and brandished his fist toward this small craft. The dog growled and barked belligerently.

Sheering away from the hostile greetings, the pilot-boat disappeared in the direction of the Capes.

"'E's gone to tell the news," said the little skipper to the dog. "Like as not somebody'll claim my prize."

The sheltered waters of Hampton Roads were reached on the morning of the second day after finding the derelict. Micky breathed a deep sigh of relief as the *Cyclops* started shortening the connecting cable with its towing-engine, and then warped alongside.

Micky greeted Red Landyard and Mike Monkey like long-lost brothers. He showed them with pride the stanch job he had done with the winch, butts and bower-chain.

He proudly pointed to the dog.

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"That's the one who 'elped us with the salvage," he said. "We'd 'a' lost everything if it 'adn't been for Jocko."

Mike Monkey gulped and leaned over the St. Bernard. He unbuckled the collar with Scotch shrewdness and tossed it into the deep waters of the bay.

"Ah've noo doot," said he, "that th' word will get oot. Somebody may be wicked enough to claim th' collie."

The dog growled and backed away from the engineer as he started patting its shaggy mane. It crept to Micky's side and rubbed against his legs. He dropped his right hand and fondled its ears. His eyes lifted over the rail. A shore-boat was putting out toward the two ships.

"'Ere comes trouble!" exclaimed the little skipper. "'Ere's a whale-boat load of pilot-fishes an' sharks. They smell the salvage money."

The shore-party were the advance agents of the *Mamora's* underwriters. Other commissioners came to the derelict and investigated the condition of the cargo—some of which was badly damaged by sea-water.

Micky McMasters got in communication with the *Cyclops's* owners. They sent down the best marine lawyers procurable. An adjustment was made wherein the little skipper, Red Landyard and Mike Monkey were guaranteed a handsome return on the profits of the enterprise. Micky figured his end of the share would net him over seven thousand dollars.

THE good news traveled far. There came to the derelict the wrathful form of a towering seaman who claimed a mammoth slice of the prize-money. He explained to the commissioners and the lawyers that he was the one-time owner of the schooner *Robert Goodwin* of Newport News—that he had lost the schooner and left a dog which had materially assisted in salvaging the *Mamora*.

He loomed over the little cockney skipper and pointed a wrathful finger at the St. Bernard. He shouted that he had heard the animal was instrumental in getting a line to the derelict; that he was the owner of Jocko and by the right claimed salvage even up to five figures.

Micky flared and shook a clenched fist at the boiling captain.

"'E ain't your dog!" he stoutly prevaricated. 'E's my dog! I 'ad 'im in Singapore an' in Southampton. I 'ad that pet for five bleeding years."

Mike Monkey stepped through the lawyers and underwriters and stood at the skipper's side. He shifted a chew and exclaimed:

"This is his collie! Ah ha'e steamed and sailed an' sweated wi' McMasters all of th' years of th' war. Ah ha'e seen him always wi' this pup."

"How old is it?" asked the irate captain. "Look, it's a young dog if ever there was one. How could it be with that man five years? It isn't five years old!"

Red Landyard solved the problem with neatness and dispatch. He pressed aside the seaman and drawled:

"This man guesses it's his dog. The skipper claims it is his, which it is. Let them prove their claims by calling the animal and seeing who it will go to."

Micky turned and climbed to the littered forepeak of the freighter. He stood by the capstan as the brutal owner of the St. Bernard stepped savagely aft and shouted—

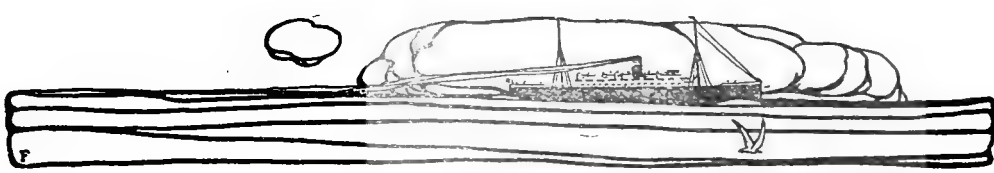
"Come here, Jocko!"

The dog crouched to the planks of the deck in fear. He remembered the voice of his former tyrant. He swung his head and stared mutely toward the form of the little skipper.

"'Ere, boy," said McMasters.

The animal leaped forward and scrambled to the forepeak. It whined for sheer joy as Mike Monkey hustled the swearing sea-captain down the slippery gangway and thrust him into a small boat.

"Ah hate a liar!" shouted the loyal first engineer of the wrecking-tug *Cyclops*, as he pushed the boat out into Hampton Roads.



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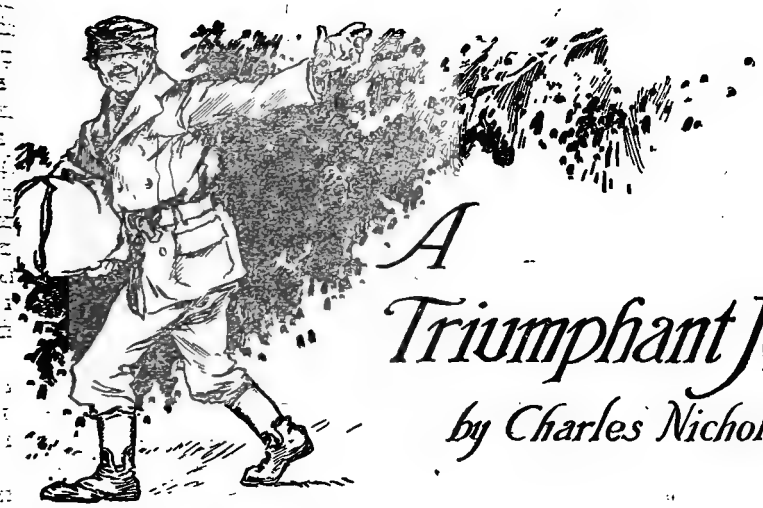

A Triumphant Journey

by Charles Nicholls Webb

:ome all you jolly lumbermen and listen to my song
: is only a few verses and I'll not detain you long)
)ncerning a young damsel or a lady young and fair,
ho dearly loved a shanty-boy upon the big Eau Claire."

THE thin voice of Paddy O'Toole rose querulously at one end of the bunk-house. It was an unwonted hour for a woodsman to be chanting the tragedy of the shanty-boy. The ɔok had just sounded the early-morning last on his horn, calling all honest lumerjacks from the blankets.

The "deacon seat" which ran along the ouble tiers of bunks on both sides of the oom was already crowded with frowzy, haggy-haired men completing their simple oilets. With the exception of Paddy)'Toole they dressed, as usual, in silence.

Tom McCoy, old and gnarled, briefly xplained the unusual circumstance to his eighbor.

"Ould Paddy will boonch it this day."

And from the songster came confirmation of his prophecy.

"Well, boys, I'm through with the woods. I'm startin' back to the corn-belt today."

Paddy O'Toole emerged from his corner and repeated the statement. He was a heavy-set, white-haired man of perhaps sixty-five years of age, but he had the rosy cheeks and the smiling face of a youngster. He had finished dressing and wore the customary Mackinaw and the high, leather-topped rubbers of the woodsman.

Frank Martin, straw-boss, looked up at the old man.

"Stake-bound again, eh?"

Paddy shook his head.

"No, it ain't that, Frank. You know as well as I do that I'm gettin' too old to be froggin' around in these here muskegs. I can't stand it. Now, my brother——"

Martin, the old man's friend, interrupted with brutal directness.

"But you ain't goin' to your brother's. You're goin' down to Dan Kelly's saloon at Tamarack, and Monday morning you'll wake up in that——lousy snake-room. How much you got comin'?"

"Five hundred dollars," said Paddy. "But they ain't nobody goin' to get it from me this time, Frank. I'll get through all right."

Frank Martin did not answer for a moment. Then, as the old man started out of the door, he intercepted him.

"Wait a minute, Pat," he called.

Going down the roughly smoothed log platform leading to the cook-camp, he placed a hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Better wait a month, old-timer, and I'll take you through."

But Paddy shook his head.

"No, I can't do it, Frank. You see I got a hunch that I better quit today and I always did play them hunches."

"Yes, and you always lose out on them. Well, go to it, old boy. I'll see you in a week or two."

"You ain't goin' to see me no more,"

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said the old man with just a touch of plaintiveness in his tone. "You ain't goin' to see me no more—in the woods, I mean."

"You always say that when you bunch your job," replied the other man dispassionately.

They entered the cook-camp, the second signal for breakfast having sounded by this time. In all well-regulated camps the monastic rule of silence is strictly enforced at meal-time. The lumberjacks ate ravenously without comment.

At one end of the long room stood the cook, a huge knife resting carelessly on one forearm. He was the unquestioned ruler of the one hundred and fifty woodsmen while they were seated at the long oilcloth-covered tables, and the knife carried, with its possibilities as a weapon, a suggestion of the cook's power and authority.

Up and down the room moved the two cooks who were kept busy attending to the wants of the woodsmen. They refilled the coffee-pots occasionally and, if necessary, replenished the stock of eatables.

Paddy O'Toole was too full of his intended journey to remain silent long.

"Gimme another little jolt of that Java, Frank," he said to the neighbor who had the coffee-pot nearest at hand.

The man lifted it and found it was empty.

Paddy shook the pot significantly and called out to the cook, who was some yards away. Then, as the boy came, he winked at the cook, who stood frowning at him.

"Got to lift the rules in my case, 'Scotty,' he called in a low tone. "You see, I'm going away today, and this here's my last meal offen tin plates."

The cook relaxed his features slightly, the nearest that dour creature ever came to a smile. As the old man finished and finally lifted his legs over the long bench, this personage came to meet Paddy.

"I want you to bring me back some real smokin'-tobacco," he said. "That clerk ain't got anything in that there wanigan that's fit to use."

"But I ain't coming back," said the old man.

"I know," said the cook, "but remember it anyway."

Slightly hurt, Paddy went directly to the bunk-house. There he put on his Mackinaw and hung his pack-sack over his shoulder. His business at the wanigan, the smallest of the group of tar-paper shacks,was short. He had notified the camp clerk the night before, and his time-check was awaiting him.

He shook hands with as many of his campmates as he could find before leaving. All said good-by in a way that gave some offense to his dignity, for it hinted of their lack of faith in his resolutions.

As he strode down the corduroy road leading from the camp, the cook called after him from the door of his shack—

"Don't forget that tobacco, Paddy."

The old man deigned no reply.

It was a crisp morning in mid-Winter. Although it was still dark in the woods, Paddy kept to the log-covered trail without effort. Far to his rear he could hear the loud voice of the tote-teamster cursing his horses and making ready for his daily trip to the railroad station, to which point supplies for the camp were shipped.

"I won't wait for him," said the old man stubbornly. "They don't believe I'm goin' home, and he would just keep a-naggin' me all the way in. But I'll fool 'em. I'll fool 'em."

He walked along quietly for a time. Two silent "lumberjack" birds fluttered through the spruce-trees in front of him. A hoot-owl screeched. A lazy, huge snow-shoe rabbit hopped slowly away into the brush. He could have knocked it over with a pole. The woods were awake. Day was at hand.

Far to the rear sounded the creak and rattle of the tote-teamster's wagon, and above it the voice of the driver singing a popular song:

"I haven't treated them just as I should;
I'd go home tomorrow if I could."

And the old man defiantly intoned another verse of the only song he had ever learned:

"The shanty-boys are rowdies, as everybody knows,
In the Winter-time they're working down where the pine-tree grows.
A-stealing ties and shingle-bolts and telling horrid lies.
A-playing cards and swearing is all their exercise."

II

TAMARACK was the first stop. It was a drab, squalid settlement whittled crudely out of the forest. During its brief existence it had proved the undoing of many a woodsman. Its few

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saloons were tolerated by the authorities though the area was legally dry under a half-forgotten Indian treaty.

As he entered the town on foot, Paddy was hailed from the door of one of them by a white-aproned bartender.

"Hello, Paddy, old-timer. How's she loggin'?"

"Go to——!" said Paddy under his breath.

He replied aloud:

"All right, Dan. Can't stop. In a hurry to make this train."

"Come and have a drink," invited the man. "You've got lots of time."

"No," said the old man. "I'm afraid I got to hurry."

"You've got all kinds of time," invited the bartender.

He came out in the street and stuck out his hand to O'Toole.

"Ain't goin' to forget old friends," he said. "I tell ye, Paddy, they's so many of these here wobblies in the woods nowadays that it does a man good to meet a regular old-timer. Why, Paddy man, you can have anything I got in the house."

"Come on, Paddy, have a drink."

Another voice came from the saloon. Paddy looked past the burly form of the bartender. This time the invitation was not to be refused.

"Come on!" urged the bartender. "It's Jack Hale. You worked with him up on the Alger-Smith line one Winter.

Paddy swung about and preceded the bartender into the place. His meeting with Hale was noisy, and was instantly followed by the usual invitation—

"Come on, Paddy, have a drink."

The bartender, nettled at the man's refusal of his own invitation, broke in with a sneer:

"Paddy ain't drinkin' any more. He's reformed. Besides he's got to make a train that's due here some time within the next hour."

Paddy gave the man's remarks little attention.

"I'm through with the woods for good this time, Jack. I'm goin' down to Illinois. My brother's well fixed, and I reckon I can make my home with him as long as I want. I'm gettin' too old, Jack, to be froggin' around in these here swamps. I——"

"Are you drinkin' or not?" broke in the bartender.

"I—I'll take somethin' soft," said the old man.

Jack Hale, a young, good-looking giant, smiled, and the bartender howled in derision.

"You'll take somethin' soft, will you? Paddy O'Toole is takin' somethin' soft, Kate."

A painted, slatternly woman appeared in the doorway and grinned at her husband.

"He ain't intendin' to stay with us this time then," she replied.

As if not noticing the woman Paddy turned again to Hale.

"My brother's got a married daughter—with a granddaughter goin' to high school; and I reckon she'll go to college, too. An' me, Jack, up here frog——"

"I know what you mean by soft, old-timer," said the bartender, and he poured out a vile-looking decoction into a whisky-glass.

Paddy looked at the glass in a troubled way. Then his face cleared and he laughed joyously.

"Come on, Dan, none of that. I know what I want. I want something soft."

The bartender laughed in a coarse, brutal manner.

"That's as soft as you can get here, old-timer." Paddy picked up his pack-sack in a determined way.

"All right, Dan. No offense. I got to hurry anyway."

The bartender looked at the drink and then at the old man for a moment as if puzzled. Then, reddening, he picked up the filthy bar-towel and struck Paddy full across the face.

"There's somethin' soft for you!" he cried.

Paddy O'Toole, struggling into the straps of the pack-sack, fell back, surprized by the blow. Jack Hale hesitated not a second but hit the bartender full on the point of his jaw. The man crumpled into a heap back of the bar. The woman in the doorway screamed and ran up-stairs.

"We got to get away in a hurry," said Hale. "I'll go with you."

The two woodsmen made for the railroad station at full speed. Fortunately the train was just pulling in, and they climbed aboard the smoking-car at once without stopping to buy their tickets.

For a time both were silent. Then Paddy inquired solicitously—

"But you wasn't goin' to leave just yet,

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was you, Jack?" The young man grinned.

"I wouldn't be very likely to stay now, would I, Paddy? Just as well for me that that little rumpus happened," he exclaimed after another long silence.

Then Paddy started talking eagerly of the wonders of his brother's farm in Illinois, of how the latter had "topped the market" at Chicago with his hogs that Winter, and of a brand-new kind of silo he had written about in his last letter. Hale listened in silence. The old man, tired by the excitement, droned along drowsily:

"An' me up here in the woods for twenty-five year. Me froggin' around these here muskeg swamps——"

His voice ceased suddenly. His head fell back on the dirty, plush-covered seat. Jack Hale looked around and grinned. His companion was fast asleep.

"Poor old Paddy," murmured the lumberjack with a smile. "I hope, by ——, he gets through."

III

WHEN they arrived at Duluth Paddy awoke with a start, and Jack Hale stood laughing at him.

"Been sleeping three hours, old man," he said. "Ought to be in good shape for a night here."

Paddy shook his head determinedly.

"I can't stay a night here," he said. "I got to go right through."

"Stay here tonight," said Jack, "and I'll go through with you. I've got some runnin' around to do, and that will take me all evening. I got a brother in Chicago and I ain't been down to the city in seven years. I got the money and if I don't go, Paddy, I'll spend it in one of these here joints."

The old man thought a minute. The offer seemed too good to be refused, but still he had a well-founded suspicion that Jack Hale was disposed to baby him.

"I won't have any trouble goin' through alone, Jack," he said. "You know I used to jaunt about the country quite a bit. I can take care of myself all right."

"I know you can, old-timer," said Jack, "but I really ought to go, now I'm in the mood. I got beyond Tamarack this time and I feel like goin' the whole route."

He thought a minute.

"I tell you what you do," he said. "You go down to Jack Calligan's place—the 'Easy Dollar,' you know. Jack'll treat you square, and if you don't want to drink, you don't have to. I'll see you there some time tonight. We'll just stay sober, old-timer, and by the holy Nellie, we'll make her this this time sure."

After due consideration, but with some misgivings, the old man nodded. Jack took himself off, and Paddy started for the Easy Dollar. At the very door of the saloon he hesitated.

"I don't want to start drinkin' at all," he said determinedly. "I won't go in just yet. I'll just walk around the streets and by and by I'll come back here and meet Jack."

With that he started away from the street upon which the Easy Dollar was located. It was known locally as the Bowery, and was a district of recruiting-stations, employment agencies, Salvation Army barracks and I. W. W. headquarters.

Through the crowds of shaggy woodsmen and underworld citizens, Paddy O'Toole elbowed his way. Upon the hill he found himself in a clearer if less familiar atmosphere. People were better dressed, and the farther away from the Bowery he went the safer from temptation he felt. It was a new experience for him, for his infrequent trips to town had seldom taken him beyond the usual haunts of the woodsmen.

Here he felt a little awkward and out of place, but nevertheless experienced a peculiar sense of regeneration. He tried with partial success to imagine himself a part of the city. A business man, prosperous and well dressed and about his own age, brushed past him. He looked after him enviously.

"I wished I hadn't been so bull-headed when I was a boy and had stayed out of them there woods," he murmured. "Can't tell how things might have gone."

He passed a jewelry-store with a large clock over the door. It was six o'clock—time for supper. The old man realized he was hungry. He tried to remember where he had seen an inviting-looking restaurant on this same street.

"I seen it somewhere along here!" he exclaimed. "It was bright and white, like a high-toned saloon."

At last he found the place—a large cafeteria, well crowded at the supper-hour. The old man looked into it dubiously. It

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seemed a trifle too elaborate for a lumberjack, and he had decided not to venture in in when he suddenly noticed a group of men in soiled working-clothes sitting at one table.

"I'm just as fit to go in there as they are," he said and promptly stepped inside.

He sat down at a table and waited for some one to take his order. Several minutes passed. People near by looked at him and grinned. Ignorant of the cafeteria system, he felt uneasy, and was on the point of arising and running away when one Larry Brown came to his rescue. This young man was seated at the next table. He came over to the old man.

"You go up to the counter and wait on yourself," he explained with a smile. "You pay for what you get, see?"

The old man thanked the young man and awkwardly followed orders. Larry Brown returned to his friend.

"I'm going to hang on to that old boy," he said. "There's a story there."

"Little human-interest stuff," grinned his friend.

"Sure," said Brown. "He's an old-timer, that man. He's bubbling over with the real stuff."

Larry Brown was a coming novelist. Just at present he was a newspaper reporter with a penchant for human-interest stories. When Paddy O'Toole returned with his tray well filled, he left his companion and seated himself opposite the old man.

"You've been up in the woods, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the old man; "for twenty-five years."

"That's a long time," said the boy.

"Yes," smiled Paddy. "I reckon you wasn't born yet when I first came up in these here lumber-woods."

He had a slight feeling of constraint in the presence of this well-dressed youth and silently applied himself to his eating.

"My name's Brown. I'm a newspaper man," said the young man after a moment or two. "I'm trying to get a line on what these I. W. W. fellows are doing up in the woods. I thought you might tell me."

Paddy O'Toole held out his hand.

"Pleased to meet ye, Mr. Brown," he said awkwardly.

"Did you run across many I. W. W.'s up there?" asked Brown. "They say they're going to pull off a big strike of lumberjacks and tie up the whole industry."

Paddy O'Toole grinned.

"Them fellows pull off a strike!" he exclaimed. "Of lumberjacks! Why, regular jacks won't associate with 'em. They're tramps. They stay in one camp long enough to get a flop and a couple of meals. Wobblies, we call 'em."

Larry Brown listened with interest.

"Well, there are more of them every year, aren't there?"

"Yes," admitted the old man. "Some of the camps are lousy with 'em. But they can't start any trouble. The jacks ain't goin' to strike. Wages are better than they ever were. I can mind the day before I came to these woods, when I was over in Michigan, when we were glad enough to get ten dollars a month, and I can tell you we worked for it. Humph, these wobblies want sugar in their tea and cake three times a day. We used to live on pork and beans and bread. Tea we had to buy extra if we got it."

HE LAUNCHED on a vein of personal reminiscence which the young man drank in eagerly. The latter was only incidentally interested in the operations of the Industrial Workers of the World. The old lumberjack was to him an epic figure out of the pioneer past—a memory of the lost romance of the northland.

Paddy O'Toole liked the boy and made no objection when Brown accompanied him from the restaurant. However, he suddenly remembered his appointment with Jack Hale.

"I got to meet a man down at the Easy Dollar Saloon," he said with some uneasiness. "Him and me are goin' down to Chicago together."

"I'll go down to the Easy Dollar with you," decided the young man quickly. "I know the proprietor."

Jack Hale was not at the Easy Dollar. It seemed there had been a change in the proprietorship of that place, and Jack Calligan was no longer behind the bar.

"Let's have a drink," said Brown.

"I ain't drinkin'!" said the old man.

"Nonsense," said the boy. "Just a beer. Two beers, partner," he signaled.

Paddy O'Toole reflected.

"Well, beer ain't exactly a hard drink, is it?" he asked.

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"Why no," said Brown. "It's a wash, by rights.

The young man did not realize what he was doing. He did not know what a single glass of beer means to a lumberjack just out of the woods who has been without liquor for half a year. It was easier to get Paddy to take a second glass, and after that not at all difficult to induce him to take a third, a fourth and a fifth. At this point the old man felt a feeling of security—a feeling that he would get to that Illinois farm without trouble anyway, and that his scruples that day had been foolish and unnecessary.

Tale after tale he reeled off to the young man, who sat listening delightedly.

Finally another woodsman hove into sight. He was one-legged, and seated himself with an effort at another table.

"How's she loggin', old-timer?" Paddy called to the man. The lumberjack did not reply.

"Have a drink?" called Paddy.

The lumberjack shook his head, and Paddy asked the bartender, who came to fill his order, who the cripple was.

"That's Dan Morgan," said the bartender. "He's all in, is old Dan. Lost his leg up on the D. W. & P., out of Cusson. Little drunk, I guess, and got caught. Don't say much, old Dan, but he thinks a lot. Got a wife and kids over in Superior. Wife'll have to take in washing. Dan ain't got nothing and can't work at nothing no more."

Old Paddy looked at the crippled woodsman pityingly. He had heard many a tale of the kind, but had never hardened himself to the million minor tragedies of the woods. The young reporter also looked at the cripple in silence.

"Like to help him, wouldn't you?" he asked.

Paddy nodded and drank slowly. His thoughts were becoming a trifle disconnected by this time, and he had a hazy idea that the reporter and the woodsman were both in need of aid and that it only required the assistance of Jack Hale to help them out of a serious situation.

"I got lots of money—lots o' money," he said finally, throwing a heap of bills on the table. "I just reckon I got more money right here in my pocket than that brother o' mine in Illinois. I'll say to him, I'll say, when I get there, I'll say——"

The old man rambled off into a maze of incoherencies. He was half-conscious of this, and once he tried to arouse himself.

"What am I talking about?" he demanded.

From this point he gave no further care to what he was talking about. How soon he became unconscious he never knew.

IV

HE OPENED his eyes in a room above the saloon and noted with some surprize that it wasn't the usual snake-room. He arose with habitual deliberation and was on his feet before he realized that there was anything extraordinary in his present situation. Then with a start he remembered that he had broken the firmest resolution he had ever made. He had been drunk. He had, moreover, spent his money—the savings of the past year—the money that was to take him to a new home and support him until he had established himself. He searched his trousers pocket, but even the leather wallet that he had kept for years had disappeared.

The old man did not waste time lamenting the loss, but made his way to the saloon below. The porter was cleaning up and the bartender was sleepily bestirring himself behind the bar.

The old man hesitated a moment and then walked out of the front door of the saloon. Outside he stood undecided for a moment. It was a bright, cold morning. Through a rift in the buildings the ice-bound harbor of Lake Superior showed a uniform dirty white.

"Guess I'll borry two dollars some place and ship up into the woods again," he reflected.

He wondered idly what had became of Jack Hale.

"Guess he got drunk same as me," he concluded.

He could not help chuckling to himself.

"Funniest drunk I was ever on. Drank beer with that young newspaper lad and before I knew it all of my money was gone. Wonder where it went to."

Then he turned his steps determinedly to the employment agency where he had obtained work in the woods before.

There were no familiar faces in the sleepy crowd about the desk, but he borrowed

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money easily enough from the first man to whom he appealed.

"Better ship up on the Smith Line, old man," said his benefactor. "That's where I'm going. They feed you up there. No gut-and-liver-line about them camps."

And the old man followed his friend's advice. He obtained the small slip which gave him work as a teamster at Camp B of the Smith Forest Products Company. Armed with this, he and his partner made their way to the dirty Union Depot, from which they were to leave half an hour later. They purchased their tickets and waited for the announcement of their train.

"I was goin' to my brother's," ventured the old man wistfully. "He's got a big farm down in Illinois and he's been after me for a long time to come and live with him. I reckon he thinks I'm too old to be froggin' around in these here swamps. I may make it in a few months."

The other woodsman swore rather viciously and said this was the last time they'd catch him shipping out into the woods. He was going to take up a homestead and he didn't know but what he'd get married in a year or two.

Then the conversation lulled. The old man picked up a paper which lay on the bench beside him and read the head-lines.

"Them Germans have sunk another ship," he announced, but his companion showed no interest.

Then, as he turned the paper, his eyes encountered a news-story on an inside page, which was so placed as to draw attention. His friend of the night before would have described it technically as a "single-column box, set in black face," meaning that it was set off by a small border and was in heavy type. The newspaper scattered many human-interest stories throughout its pages in this way. However, it was the headline that drew his attention. It read:

WOODSMAN SACRIFICES LONG-PLANNED TRIP TO AID CRIPPLED FRIEND

Because he felt sorry for a fellow woodsman who was badly crippled, Paddy O'Toole last night gave $300 to Dan Morgan, and thereby sacrificed a long-planned trip to Illinois.

Then the story, which was written in Larry Brown's best style, elaborated on the old man's generosity and the great sacrifice he had made. It quoted one of his rapturous descriptions of the Illinois farm and ended with this burst of newspaper rhetoric:

Tomorrow Paddy O'Toole, old-time lumberjack, will return to the woods. He will save for months and months and patiently plan his coming trip to God's country again. He may never come as close to making it as he did this time. He may never get beyond one of the vice-infested settlements of the north country. However, he has done this: He has brought happiness and renewed hope to Dan Morgan and to Dan Morgan's family.

The old man read the story again.

"So that was where it went," he commented.

He looked at the paper without smiling and remembered hazily an eager, well-clothed youth urging him to do something which he had a half-formed drunken desire to do himself. He visioned vague pictures of the night before. Then he threw the paper aside in sickening disgust.

"Oh,——!" he said.

Then he sat moodily looking at the groups of people scattered about the big waiting-room.

"It fixes Dan Morgan all right," he said, "but it ain't anything to make a fuss about. Reckon they didn't care whether Dan Morgan was helped. Reckon they thought I was drunk and was goin' to spend my money anyway and that was the best way."

At that moment he heard the caller announcing their train, and he aroused his companion, who was half-asleep. They picked up their packs and started toward the train-shed.

"Here we go back to the woods again," he commented wearily to himself as they went down the iron stairs. "I wish to God it was the other direction!"

Then he added, a trifle cynically—

"But I helped Dan Morgan."

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A Teacher of Etiquette

by ES Pladwell

Author of "The Boss of Mirage," "Highly Civilized," etc.

IN THE old days he had been very sinful. He had cleaned out banks, sold Indians liquor, rustled cattle, shot up settlements, and even robbed trains. Folks called him "Bull" Judson in those days because of his broad shoulders and warlike disposition.

He was the king-pin terror of Gila county. Then a bullet ripped out his left eye, his pals deserted him, his girl ran away with a deputy sheriff, the officers chased him from pillar to post, and finally he sought a hot and lonely gully among the high mountains of another county, where the suns and rains and sand-storms of thirty years melted away most of his wickedness and left him just a simple though irascible old hermit who looked like some dangerous old Santa Claus with one glaring eye.

And then some one stole his horse.

It was not the hammer-headed buckskin which he used on ordinary errands. It was the big, proud sorrel he had raised from colthood, bought with ill-earned funds from an Indian who said he owned it. The Indian also produced a neatly written document proving that the horse's pedigree was second to none in the whole Southwest, said document being duly attested before a notary and gummed up with red seals.

The document was utterly genuine. So was the colt. The old man knew horses and he knew Indians, so he bought and asked no questions, trusting that no one would come along and discover the animal. He pastured the sorrel on a meager range alongside a warm and muddy spring, using it only on state occasions.

When it disappeared the old sinner did not know of the matter for two days because he was pottering around a sage-covered hillside where he thought he had found some gold.

When realization of the tragedy finally seeped into the old ruffian's brain he set his wrinkled jaw, cooked a mess of bacon and *frijoles*, filled three canteens, donned cartridge-belts, oiled his two famous pistols, nailed up his cabin door, mounted the buckskin, and sallied forth to mete justice.

He realized that he cared more for that sorrel than for anything else in the world, so he followed hoof-prints and hearsay evidence for six long weeks until at last the hot and dusty trail led him to Gila City.

Hobbling the buckskin in the suburbs, he plodded into Gila on a blistering forenoon, not without a certain hesitation. Once he had killed three of the town's citizens and dodged a posse. That was thirty-four years in the past, but he did not know just how much had been forgotten. His one eye had a perpetually puzzled expression, and as he ambled down the paved main street it became worse.

His glance roved from asphalt to car-track and thence to fire-hydrant, store window and skyscraper as if he wondered if he were awake. A taxicab whizzed around a corner and missed him by an inch. He jumped and glared, just avoiding the fender

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of a street-car. That made him beat a blasphemous retreat to the curb, where he sat down to think it over.

Sometimes pedestrains turned to give this ancient apparition a curious glance. Rangers and cattlemen were common enough in Gila, but this old-timer looked as if he belonged in the Catalogue of Pioneers in the museum. The pedestrians wore business clothes or Palm Beach suits.

He was clad in an old felt hat, a sweaty blue shirt, blue overalls and high boots, all faded and worn from age and the long journey. The trusty six-shooters at his side had a total of fourteen notches in their handles; but nobody noticed that.

A KHAKI-UNIFORMED traffic-policeman on the corner advanced toward the newcomer. The chief of police had ordered his men to assist wanderers wherever found, this kindly idea being fostered by the Gila City Chamber of Commerce, whose motto was "Make Strangers Feel at Home." The policeman proceeded to do it.

"What's the matter, pop?" he inquired. "Lost?"

"Heh?" demanded the old ruffian, squinting upward. This neat personage in khaki and bronze buttons made him feel ill at ease. "Mebbe I am," he grunted at length. "Is this Gila City? It shore looks mighty strange!"

"Certainly. Gila City. Corner of Fourth and Main."

The old hermit's face wrinkled. "Then where's Tony Bronson's saloon? Where's Mike Petty's dance-hall ? They ought to be right there."

And he pointed across the street.

"Never heard of 'em. I guess you re behind the times, dad. This ain't a Wild West town any more. That big store over there is Cohen's Mammoth Incorporated Dry-Goods Emporium, and that big building opposite's the Chamber of Commerce—tallest skyscraper in Arizona."

"Heh!" chuckled the old sinner. "Well, at least I'm in Arizony!" He looked up at the man in uniform again. "Who are you?" he demanded, suspiciously.

"Me? Oh, I'm just Phil McCabe of the police force."

"Po-lice?" The old man jumped up suddenly and his face became dark with distrust. "I thought so!" he muttered, nodding a disgusted head. "Well, I guess you better trot along and lemme alone!"

"Why? What's the matter with you?"

The old ruffian's eye was hard and cold. "Nothin'," he responded. "Only, you better leave me alone. See? Durn it, can't a man be in town five minutes without havin' you darned nuisances startin' along after him? You lemme alone. That's all. You lemme alone!"

The patrolman started thinking. The old man's words were self-incriminating. He had practically admitted he was "wanted." The next thing was to find who wanted him, and for what crime. That could be done at headquarters. Of course this aged stranger was well armed, but he looked like a "hick" who was easy to overawe. Also, the policeman had law and authority on his side.

"So-ho!" The officer put out a mandatory hand. "I guess you better come along with me!"

The old man sidestepped.

"You lemme alone!" he demurred.

"What are you tryin' to do?"

"Come along!" insisted the policeman, trying to grasp him again.

"Where to?" asked the dazed old hermit, backing away.

"Never you mind that!" barked the patrolman, with the gentle tact of policeman the world over. "You come along with me. See?" And he grabbed the old man's arm.

That patrolman has since been the most cautious, tactful and courteous man on the force. His conversion started the instant he took hold of old Bull Judson. That peppery ruffian jumped back like lightning, jerked out a pistol, blew the patrolman's hat off, amputated a toe with another bullet, reversed the pistol, slammed the butt into his head, knocked him down, and then backed around the corner.

It all happened in two seconds. A crowd had formed while the officer was making the arrest, but the crowd was half a block away, going fast.

Taxicabs halted with grinding brakes. Pedestrians ducked around buildings. Two trolley-cars stopped. A horse ran away. Clerks in the cigar-store at the old man's corner squirmed under their counter, while somebody blew a shrill police whistle and its echo skirled from other whistles down the excited street.

The cause of it all sidled along an alley, climbed a fence, strolled through a back

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yard littered with boxes, entered a rear door, sailed past a person demonstrating washing-machines in a store, and emerged through the front door to a relatively quiet street and made his way to a livery-stable.

After inspecting the stock and finding no stolen sorrel, the old reprobate asked the friendly owner as to where liquor could be found. Arizona is a dry State but the old man was thirsty, and though he had his own stock in the hills the ways of the city were new to him. The stable-owner finally decided he was "safe" and gave him explicit directions.

Ten minutes later the old outlaw breezed into Henry Meyers's Drug-Store, eight blocks from the stable. He strode up to the soda-fountain aggressively and slammed a dollar on the near-marble.

"Gimme a shot of pizen licker!" he commanded. "Best you got in the house!"

The lean-faced druggist turned green. "You—you've got the wrong place!" he stuttered. Why—we never keep liquor here!"

"You do!" contradicted the old villain. "She's in a dimmyjohn in a locker under the cash-register. Don't argue with me! Durn it, everybody seems to want to trifle with me today! Do you want to join 'em?"

"Whoa!" came a deep bass voice from among the seven startled persons in the room, making the druggist tremble like a leaf. "Licker under the cash-register, hey? Let's look into this!" And a heavy-set, broad-faced man with square-toed shoes trod to the counter and turned behind it.

THE old outlaw didn't know what it was all about. He was told he could get a drink here, so he had come after it, frankly and honestly. The interruption jarred him. He was about to make a few timely remarks to the large person, but that citizen had reached under the cash-register and triumphantly produced a big demijohn.

"So!" he remarked to the trembling druggist. "Licker, hey? M-m! I thought there was some queer things about this drug-store!"

"Who are you?" snarled old Bull Judson. He wanted his drink.

"Detective McManus of the Purity Squad," grunted the other, with a sardonic grin. "Much obliged to you for your information. You've helped to nail this bird."

"Purity squad?" gurgled the dazed old man.

"Sure," explained the detective, disgustedly. "We're conductin' a vice crusade. The Gila City Women's Civic Federation started a clean-up campaign and we're the goats. Their husbands own two newspapers so—what can the police do except get busy?"

At the word police the old man's ears pricked up. It seemed as if they were all over the place, like ants in a honey-barrel! He forgot his drink. He had only an aching desire to get away. But the other's voice arrested him.

"I'll need you for a witness," he announced. "Gimme your name and address."

The old ruffian backed away. "You lemme alone!" he warned. "You go git some one else!"

The detective looked surprized at this refusal. His face grew stern.

"Look here, Santy Claus, I want your name and address!" he barked. "You're a witness. Get me?"

The cold eye that had tamed more than one wild maverick of the West glared at the detective balefully, and the gnarled old hands swung toward those pistols with the notches in the handles.

"Are you seekin' to git hostile?" the old man inquired, his voice silky.

The detective began to see a light. He knew that the hot desert that stretched for miles from Gila City still held tough old scorpions, and he realized that this was probably one of them. As a witness this desert-rat wouldn't be worth a hoot anyhow, so the detective decided to dismiss him. The sleuth took a lofty attitude to hide his change of front.

"Oh, all right!" he snapped. "Run along. Go on, get out of here!"

The dismissal brought the old wildcat's volcanic temper to concert pitch. He was not used to such offhand treatment. He was usually given the most profound respect. He had even received it once from a posse that had tried to hang him. In the present instance he was anxious to leave the drug-store, but not without dignity.

"Who're you talkin' to?" he exploded. "Don't you git fresh with me or I'll jam your tongue into your boots! Purity! Purity! Heh! You git to foolin' with strangers that-a-way and you'll be pure for keeps! Purity' ——!"

The startled detective was taken aback

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at such public defiance. He suddenly found himself in an embarrassing position. Under other circumstances he might have smoothed things over with this old one-eyed belligerent with the lashing tongue, but this was a public place and a police detective can not back down publicly without great loss of prestige.

He must put on a bold and authoritative front. Therefore this one advanced upon old Bull Judson, intending to deal with him sternly.

Four minutes later the old warrior emerged from the rear of the wrecked drug-store, to which various persons were hurrying via the front door, attracted by the screams of women, the crash of bottles and window-glass, the noise of a shot, and wild yells.

The old rascal's mood was by now highly bellicose. He was sizzling with wrath. He had come into Gila City, yearning for peace and quiet and trying in all earnestness to go about his honest business. In spite of this he had twice been set upon and he felt a righteous resentment.

He resolved to see this thing through. He might have left town otherwise, but now it was a fight to a finish. The law? He never had any respect for the law in all his sixty-three years and he wasn't starting now. Furthermore, he was going to find that sorrel horse if he had to turn the town upside down.

"Durn their hides!" he snarled. "If they want trouble they'll git it!"

THE full meaning of the old malefactor's threat against the peace and dignity of the city of Gila was not realized even by himself. He merely did as he pleased. On the other hand, the town was standing on its head. Two hurry calls came to the emergency hospital for ambulances within as many hours. Extra policemen mobilized at the Central Station and waited for the riot-calls.

Detectives were dispatched hither and yon. Newspapers arranged head-lines concerning the "mysterious thug," and the sheriff was notified to be ready for anything. But grim old Bull Judson just ambled around and dealt with people as he pleased. Just by luck his pursuers never seemed to cross his trail until too late.

"He flits arounds like a mosquito," complained Chief of Police Benton that evening across the dinner-table in the mezzanine grill of the big Hotel Gila, while the orchestra played soft music. "He just pulverizes 'em and then floats away. First one side of town and then the other. Confound him, he's showing up my whole force!"

"What's the motive?" inquired old Superior Judge Lawrence, seated opposite, in evening clothes. "Robbery?"

"Apparently not. That's what I don't understand. It looks like plain cussedness. He just picks out his victims and then sails in."

"It doesn't sound reasonable."

"Maybe not," agreed the chief. "I only know what's happened. Take for instance that conductor on the Country Club interurban car. The assailant started to get on and then seemed to change his mind. The conductor tried to hurry him up and the man climbed aboard and took the conductor to pieces. What sort of doings would you call that?"

"Hem! It depends on the conductor."

"He didn't do anything, apparently. Just told this old vulture to step lively, and he stepped lively."

There was a grin behind the silver-white mustache of the old judge.

"Hem!" he observed. "Perhaps one of these conductors got familiar with the wrong man." His voice imitated the gruff and overbearing accents of the worst type of traction employee. "'Hey—we ain't got all day to wait fer you! Wadda you think we're doin'—takin' a nap? Giton or gitoff! *Ding-ding!*'" The judge chuckled and his voice became ruminative. "We're a highly civilized community now and proud of it, but maybe that nickel-searcher ran up against an old-timer. Can you imagine any conductor ordering folks around in the old days of Gila, when every man wore his six-shooter?" He chuckled again. "I wonder what Geronimo would do, or Seth Nicholson, or Mocho the Apache, or Bull Judson, or Mike Hathaway, or any of the other old hellions that used to shoot the town to pieces?"

The tall and burly chief of police sighed.

"I don't know. You're an old-timer here and I'm not. If it does any good, I'll say that this old blister looks like Santa Claus and wears two six-shooters."

The judge quit looking ruminatively toward the wriggling electric signs down Main Street, and stiffened in his chair.

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"That's it! Just as I suspected!" he observed. "An old two-gun man! I'm beginning to understand!"

His glance went past the roofs and lights of the brilliant city to where the black silhouettes of the distant mountains pointed toward the stars—the mountain where pioneer, Indian, settler and road-agent had wrought to make Arizona's history picturesque and her towns highly uncomfortable.

In an instant the old judge's mind went back forty years. He forgot his environment. He was just a young deputy sheriff again, booted and spurred, watching those grim mountains and wondering what scourge was next to storm through the pass and smash the town. Was it Mocho the Apache, or was it Nicholson or Judson and their gangs? Would they burn the settlement or just shoot it up? And then a trolley-bell jangled below and a taxicab honked, and the old judge came out of his reverie and looked upon white table-cloths, cut glass, shining silverware, obsequious waiters, dress suits and bare shoulders.

The voice of the chief of police came booming into the old judge's consciousness again.

"——more trouble. Four Eastern cities are advising me to watch for the toughest bunch of thugs, yeggs, strong-arm men and plain murderers that ever made toward the Pacific Coast in one crowd. They seem to have headed straight for Gila."

"Why Gila?"

"Oh, we're sort of a health-resort, I guess," said the chief, sarcastically. "Probably they think they've picked Gila for a nice, quite, obscure hick town where they can lay low." The chief's eyes sparkled and his jaw set. "They won't!" he declared. "They can't pick us for an easy mark!"

"What are you doing about it?"

"Getting ready to pull them in just as soon as we find them! They can't pick Gila for any hick town!" The chief was a booster, filled with a righteous pride about his thriving city. "Look there, for instance." He pointed toward the entrance to the John C. Fremont Opera-House, opposite, where a great electric sign blazoned the attraction. "The Gila City Union High-School Department of Music in Parsifal." I guess that's going some! In New York it took 'em a million dollars and two years before they had the nerve to tackle that opera, but there we just trot out our school kids and they slide right through it. Huh! If those Eastern big-city crooks think they've hit a tank town, they're going to wake up!"

"Yes," said the judge, "but how about this old rip-snorter that's cavorting about town? I'm more interested in him."

"Oh, we'll get him sooner or later if we have to close his other eye. He can't last long."

"His other eye? Half-blind, you mean? Hum. Let's see. No, I can't remember any old-timer with only one eye. There was only one real one-eyed terror in Arizona and that was Bull Judson—six feet tall, four feet broad, and a brain as stubborn as a battering-ram. He disappeared thirty years ago. Died or something."

"I heard about that," remarked the chief, stirring his demi-tasse. "You married his girl, didn't you?"

"I sure did. Furthermore, if old Bull had been like his girl, he'd have been the finest citizen in Arizona. She couldn't reform him so she came and reformed me. That's why I'm a superior judge."

"Did he get sore?"

"Sore? He was the maddest scoundrel in Arizona! He got so grieved that he even shot up the wedding ceremony. We held it in Bill Robinson's 'dobe house across the river, with the bride in her grandmother's wedding gown from Maine, me in a suit of mail-order store-clothes, and seven other young deputies for best men, also dressed in hand-me-downs and looking most——uncomfortable.

"All they did was fidget in a corner, pull at their white collars, and try to appear nonchalant. Just as the nuptial words were finished old Bull broke off congratulations by slamming rifle-bullets through the door from somewhere outside. The bride fainted, I got a permanent scar across my left hand, and the minister is probably running yet. The boys sent regrets to the nuptial dance because they wore off their new pants chasing Bull through the brush.

"They got a better outfit later and chased around for three weeks, but they never found hide nor hair of him. Maybe he fell in the river, ending one of Arizona's most violent and unregenerate careers. Ho-hum. We're a civilized community now and we're quiet and law-abiding and decent; and yet—somehow I'd like to meet your old peace-disturber, just to get back some of my youth."

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"I understand," nodded the chief, lighting a perfecto brought by a uniformed flunky as the orchestra burst into jazz-music for the dinner-dance. "I'll let you in at the finish. When we catch that old delinquent I'll phone you."

And they sat back and watched the couples in the fox-trot.

MEANWHILE the unsuspecting subject of the conversation was finishing his own repast in the modest home of one Miguel Salazar, not fifty yards from the old 'dobe where the judge had been married. That historic edifice was now a Chinese laundry, and beyond it was the Little Gem Laundry Soap factory, and beyond that the Armour refrigerating-plant and the railroad yards. What was once the aristocratic section of town had become socially "low"; and yet old Bull was satisfied for the first time since he had arrived in Gila.

Away from trolley-cars, policemen, taxi-cabs, bright lights, movie-houses, jingle music and other bewildering evidences of a restless civilization, the old hermit had found a comparative contentment. He had drifted here by accident and met a welcome. Beside him was an aged Mexican with a wrinkled face who remembered the old days fluently even though he could not place his visitor.

In front of the guest were *tortillas*, *frijoles*, *tamales*, *enchiladas* and other Mexican dishes, banked profusely about the smelly oil lamp. Above them were red peppers strung from the low and shadowy rafters, and beyond the table a stout *señora* was breathing soft moans on a harmonica while her eight children of assorted sizes squabbled and squalled about the floor.

"I don't like Gila no more," announced the old gunman during a conversation. "The folks is too durned unpolite. Time was when gents was blamed cautious about barkin' at each other—durned keerful—but now every little car-driver and automobile lunatic thinks he's got a right to talk to people like they was dawgs. Huh! If that's civ'lization I wanna go where folks is more po-lite!"

"You are right, *señor*," nodded the old Mexican while he sipped from a glass of sour wine. "There is too much—what you call—hustle. It ruins the manners."

"Yeh. Especially po-licemen. I never seen nothin' like it. Seems like they give a young feller a unyform, turn him loose, and tell him to be jest as durned mean and ornery as possible to every one. Dang 'em, they ought to git a lesson—the whole kit an' boodle of 'em!"

"Quite right. I, too, have had trouble with the police," sighed old Miguel, reminiscently. "But it is not only the police, *señor*; it is every one. And sometimes they have strange talk which I do not know. For an example, *señor*: Tonight I saw young men walking past this place and leading horses, one of them very beautiful. To speak true, *señor*, the animal was of such fineness that my eye was made glad by him, so that I followed along until I saw them stable the horses in a very poor house near the gas-tanks.

"I did not know that I was observed until two youths with bad faces spoke to me, asking what I did there. I told the truth, *señor*, saying I liked horses and was stricken by this one, until at last they were sure I meant no harm to them. But when they were going away one returned and said, calling me an old gink very evilly, that if I squealed they would croak me. In the name of all the merciful saints, what talk is that? Does he call me a frog so I may croak, or a rat so I may squeal? Does he insult me, or is it just some more American language? *Señor*, I ask you."

Old Bull was sitting up by now, a knife full of boiled potato poised en route to his mouth.

"I dunno," he responded. "It's new to me. What sort o' horse was it?"

"I could not see well in the dark, *señor*, but it looked like a very light bay—very beautiful and with a head oh, so proud. It walked like a lady, very dainty, picking its way."

"Did it have white on it?"

"In the head, I think, *señor*, and also on the forefeet."

"Hurrah!" yelled old Bull, dropping the knife and jumping up. "Goshalmighty, man, that's my horse!" He noted the blank look of the other impatiently. "Durn it, that's my horse! Savvy? Stolen from me! Lead the way!"

And he slammed on his hat and jumped for the door.

But old Miguel Salazar held back.

"Come on!" roared the old gun-fighter. "What's the matter?"

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The Mexican shrugged his shoulders.

"I am old and very tired," he murmured. "This thing is not for me. I do not like the faces of the young men and the talk about croak. I do not understand them, *señor*, but they mean things that are not noble. I will show you the way—yes. I will go—no!"

The truculent beard of old Judson jutted forward and he snorted. Fear was the one thing he did not know and could not understand. The scornful, insulting glare of his one violent eye seemed to lash the other from head to foot. Then the old ruffian began to remember his ancient frontiersman's contempt for the other's race, and he made allowances.

"Oh, well, you wouldn't be no use anyhow," he remarked. "How do I git there?"

The Mexican came to the door and gave directions quite eagerly. Certain subtle instincts were beginning to awaken and give him desires to speed the parting guest. He had seen that dangerous eye before somewhere. He did not remember just where, but he felt that the incident had somehow been unpleasant. If the haze of thirty-five years had lifted from his brain he would have seen himself crawling out of the rear door of a gambling-hall, dressed in a skirt because a terrorizing two-gun personage with uncouth manners had decided that the gentlemen in the hall were not men but women, and should be clad accordingly.

The rough and violent person had even donated the clothes for his sardonic little masquerade, kicking those who were slow to see the humor in it. Miguel had been slow at first, gaining speed very quickly. But that was all in the past and forgotten. Miguel knew only that he wanted to give the proper directions with great haste.

"You go beyond the soap-factory and the big ice-plant, *señor*, and then you go across many railroad tracks with red and green lights. From there you walk two blocks onward and turn to the left across the river, where you will see a big gas-tank. Under that is the place with your horse. I hope the saints give you successes of the most bountiful. *Buenos noches, señor!*"

ALL went well with the old reprobate until after he had crossed the tracks, with the reflections of the city's down-town lights far to his left. The old ruffian was happy at last. He was now on the last lap of the long trail, and he even chuckled to himself as he swung along, thinking of nothing but his find.

There was a shriek of auto-brakes to his right. A big, heavy, expensive machine thundered down upon him, turned on one wheel to avoid him, skidded, slapped into a telephone-pole, and hunched over sidewise with its left front wheel smashed. It happened so quickly that old Bull hardly had time to jump.

C. Ellingwood Blount, president of the Gila City Traction Company, the Western Arizona National Bank, and seven other corporations, shot forward from the brocaded seat in the rear of the limousine and then bounced back with all his two hundred pounds. For an instant his small eyes, puffy jowls and sensual mouth had a scared look, but when he had quit bouncing it had gone.

He readjusted his tall silk hat, patted his elegant cravat into position, and then cast about for the source of the trouble. It was standing silently under an arc-light—the figure of a tall, broad-shouldered, bearded old man in slouchy clothes, with pistols in holsters at his sides.

C. Ellingwood Blount first thought of a holdup, but the man just stood there and said nothing. The magnate then decided it was just one of those bucolic old desert-rats. The pistols meant nothing to him. They were still somewhat common in the country outside.

The magnate cleared his throat and first spoke to the imported Japanese chauffeur, severely and yet meaning exact justice.

"Did this man cause the accident, Higo?"

"Yessa," said the Jap, getting out. "I blow horn. He pay no 'tention. He walk in front of me. I try not kill him. I do so."

"Quite right!" ruled the imposing lord of the money-bags. "Now!"

He turned toward the silent character under the light and bawled forth his anger.

"Look here, you—what do you think you're doing? I was trying to catch a train! Haven't you sense enough to keep out of the way? Come here!"

The bearded man stayed still, moving not a muscle. C. Ellingwood Blount stuck a hand out of the side window. His attitude was imperious and mandatory.

"See here, my man—I told you to come here!"

"I'm liable to," returned the old man,

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with a queer intonation. "I'm jest thinkin'. You said, 'See here, my man.' Ain't you got the wrong party?"

"Never mind that!" snapped Blount. "You come here!"

"Who? Me?"

"Yes—you!"

The bearded figure shifted slightly.

"Are you aimin' to git hostile?" he inquired.

Blount jumped up wrathfully and shook his fist.

"See here, you wooden-headed lout—don't argue with me! You get a move on! Do you get that through your thick head? You—come—here!"

Bull Judson came. The Japanese tried to interpose but he only excited the old gunman's whirlwind temper. The Jap went rolling into the dirt street and then the old belligerent launched himself upon C. Ellingwood Blount.

"Durn ye, it's time some one l'arned you manners!" snarled the old villain, catching the magnate's face in his mighty hands and shaking him viciously. "I've had enough of this danged nonsense today! I'm gittin' tired of it! I'm not your man! Don't yell at me like that!"

And he joggled Bount's head around and slapped a hand across his mouth, stifling a howl.

"Oh!" gurgled the magnate. He acted quickly, to save trouble. "Here's my watch—*wugh*—my wallet—take them—ugh!"

Old Judson found a wallet full of bills thrust between his right hand and the capitalist's throat, warding off the attack. The old reprobate was about to fling the wallet aside, but changed his mind and grabbed it.

"Money, hey?" he roared. "Money! That's all you white-faced scrubs think about! I don't want your money—you take it. Here—eat it, durn you—mebbe it'll teach you manners! That's what I'm goin' to give you—manners! Here's a hundred-dollar bill—start on that!" And he pulled open the jaw of C. Ellingwood Blount and jammed a crisp piece of currency into the sensual mouth.

A plodding patrolman of the Gila City metropolitan police force happened around ten minutes later, finding an apoplectic and spluttering magnate who had just dined on three thousand dollars in paper money.

At sight of the police uniform, C. Ellingwood Blount gurgled wild things about a bearded desperado and shrieked for vengeance, adding a few snappy remarks about the vigilance of the police force. The patrolman, galvanized to sudden efficiency, rushed to the nearest telephone and then slunk away on the trail of the bearded disturber of the peace. A few minutes later a riot-squad of officers came up in their fast auto to C. Ellingwood Blount's broken limousine and listened to his language; but by that time the lone patrolman was nearing the gas-tanks.

Meantime old Bull Judson had made his way past the tin cans and ashes of the public dump and approached an old board shanty where a dim light flickered through tiny cracks in the walls.

It was a dark, squalid and smelly neighborhood, unfit for human habitation. Under faint stars the black silhouette of the big gas-tank stood like a sentinel of evil. In front of its base stood the shack.

The old frontiersman wormed his way cautiously toward the structure, with every sense alert for possible trouble. Judson's desert-trained instincts were now in full play. He could smell danger as he could smell water, and the danger-smell was distinct. He slipped up to a side wall and put his eye to a small crack.

A single candle burned on a dirt floor where blankets were spread. Seated on the blankets or moving about the room quietly were six queer-looking men, most of them young and rat-faced and two others burly, unshaven and utterly repulsive.

Beyond the men, toward the rear, were some horses, with the light flickering on their glistening sides when they moved. One of them was a big and handsome sorrel, munching from a feed-bag.

The old frontier ruffian was not able to size the humans up at all. With his one good eye squeezed to the crack, he found himself completely mystified. These people were new. Their shifty, pasty faces did not belong to Arizona and neither did their language. When one of them spoke the old sinner became bewildered utterly.

"I'll chase some scoffin's," announced a leader, "an' den you guns better flop here till de high sign. Mike, glom yer lamps on de soup, till it's time to blow. Here, Ikey, slip me de snow."

"Well, I'm durned!" muttered the old frontiersman, blinking his one good eye.

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HE PONDERED for a moment and made his decisions. Though he was bewildered, flabbergasted and stumped by those queer-looking beings within the shack, a certain handsome sorrel was also there; and he had come to get that sorrel. He decided that the boldest move was the wisest. Therefore he strode to the door and flung it open.

Six blank faces turned. Six alarmed forms jumped to their feet, while six open mouths registered consternation. The old man sensed footsteps behind him—an excited and humiliated lookout coming in. Judson slipped sidewise, away from the door and the danger of a rear attack.

"Here, I want that horse!" he demanded, pointing toward the sorrel imperiously. "Trot him out! Git a move on!"

A weasel-faced being with eyes set close together faced the intruder like a rat cornered. He was nearest to the old man.

"Where'd you git dat bull?" he snarled. "Who're you? A dick?"

"None of your danged business who I am!" exploded the old ruffian. "You trot out that horse!"

"Aw—t'row 'im out!" came a growl from some one in the crowd.

Old Bull Judson was at last in an atmosphere that he could fully appreciate. Here were danger, opposition and defiance. His face had a queer smile and his gray eye flashed coldly. He was just roiled enough to want a fight anyhow. His day's experiences had worn on his nerves.

"Yeh. Throw me out," he invited, keeping his hands swaying easily near his hips.

Certain shifty eyes sent silent messages toward two big "strong-arm men," who started cautiously toward the old man, trying to get behind him.

"Glom his gats!" came a whisper. "Watch out for de soup!" came another.

A man sneaked behind a mate and produced an automatic pistol unobserved, while a smaller person with a hooked nose sidled toward the candle to stamp out its light. The lookout closed the door softly and jumped outside to make sure that no others were coming to the shanty. It was all quiet and shifty and furtive—like ghosts moving.

The old frontiersman understood. They acted just like the Indians of his youthful days preparing to pounce on a settler they had cornered. There was the same quick breathing, the same faint, sneaking *scuffle-scuffle-scuffle* of feet and hands, the same expressionless faces and hate-filled eyes.

"Nix!" came a hoarse whisper from among them. "Can de gat. Don't croak 'im dat way. De bulls'll git next!"

They had decided on the more noiseless weapons.

"Well," roared old Bull, "are you goin' to gimme my horse?"

There seemed to be a tremor among the shifty forms, but one with a mind for delay put up a hand and faced the old warrior.

"Where'd you git dat stuff?" he demanded. "Dey ain't your skates. Dey're ours. See?"

The forms were moving just a little closer to Judson. He understood. He backed toward the wall a bit and held hands near his hips, very easily.

"Yours, hey?" he thundered. "Then how'd you git 'em. Hey. Speak up!"

"Bought 'em!" rasped the other. "Wid good kale. See?"

"Who from?"

"Aw, from a guy that said he owned 'em," returned the other, telling the absolute truth but not caring. "What's it to you?"

"They're mine!" insisted the old ruffian.

He realized that the talk was only to give time for their movements, and that something was going to happen very soon. He sensed it in every fiber. He had been through it all before.

The corner of his eye noted a quick movement to his left. Something started to descend in an arc upon his head—a black-jack. Quick as light his trained left hand went downward and outward. His fingers twitched on a trigger. A noise like a cannon-shot blasted from his hand. There was a yell and the form pitched forward under his feet.

Another man jumped forward while the rest stopped and moved their hands nimbly, gripping things. Old Judson swung out his second gun and another flash of flame blew out of it. The man leaped up and went down.

A line of fire swept toward the old man from a vicious automatic, then another, and another. Some one tried to put out the candle. The man fell to the floor, shrieking and holding his stomach. Meantime old Judson felt those flashes of flame spitting, spitting, spitting toward him like fiery hot needles. Two or three of the needles

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jabbed into him, but he did not care now.

He pulled trigger savagely. His heavy pistols exploded like field-guns. They were not little pocket automatics with tiny bullets that went through; they were the old frontier forty-fives that smashed, tore and killed.

The smoky place was ablaze with crackling fire. It was a madhouse of roars and shrieks. The horses were snorting, pitching and rearing. One was down. Three men were stiff on the floor and another was writhing. He rolled the candle over. It struck some loose hay and then the nearest blanket. The wall blazed.

The horses squealed and kicked in a frenzy of terror. Another blast of gun-fire swept the room. But the old man could not see it. A form was closing on him, wielding something hard and shiny. He struck with a pistol-butt, using all his desperate strength. The man grunted and slumped down. Then another form leaped upon old Judson, and another, and another, and still more, shouting and gasping and yelling and cursing till faintness siezed him and he lay still.

The old man struggled through a great darkness. Shadowy forms flitted about him and far-away voices spoke gibberish that came nearer and clearer until at length he could piece the talk together and grope for understanding. One of the voices came close to his ear, speaking in a tone that seemed hoarse and uncanny:

"They can't kill this old lizard. He's got a constitution like rubber. Five bullets clean through him, mostly arms and thighs. Probably not dangerous unless septemia sets in—— I guess so—— He might be out of here in two weeks——"

OLD BULL JUDSON opened his astonished eyes and found himself lying in a clean white bed, with the smell of drugs assailing his nostrils. A young man with spectacles and white clothes was bending over him, and beyond that person was a linen-clad female murse and a man in a khaki uniform with shoulder-straps.

The old man tried to sit bolt upright. Sudden pains gripped him. He lay back, took his time, recovered his poise, and then glared about again with his one belligerent eye.

"How you feeling?" asked the young doctor. He noted the old villain's bewildered look. "You're in the Gila City emergency hospital," he volunteered.

Old Judson grunted. He had something else on his mind. "I don't git it!" he rasped at length, querulously. "I counted six men in the shanty. One outside. That makes seven. Only seven. I don't git it. There must 'a' been two dozen pilin' on me! Durn it, there's somethin' wrong!"

"Shush!" advised the doctor. "It's all right. That was the police. They were only two blocks away when the shooting began. They didn't know who to tackle in the mess, so they jumped on everybody. Better not talk. Take it easy!"

The old ruffian's leathery face skewered into wrinkles. "Po-lice!" he snarled, bitterly. "I might of known it! Low-down, ornery, big-mouth pack of unpolite skunks! Oh—dang the police!"

"Shush!" pleaded the doctor. "The chief of police is here!"

"Dang him too!" cursed the old scoundrel impartially.

The chief came forward with a queer grin on his face, and met the glare of that one hostile eye.

"Judson," opened the chief, "I don't know whether we ought to hang you or give you a medal."

The old reprobate seemed to squirm when his name was mentioned. So they had discovered him!

"Sure," said the other, interpreting the look. "We went through your pockets. We have to identify everybody that goes to hospital—or jail."

The old sinner's throat rumbled with a growl. "Heh! It took forty years to git me this far—don't be too durned sure about jail!"

"I'm not," confessed the chief, frankly. "You've turned the town inside out and disturbed the peace something scandalous; and yet—you've cleaned out the toughest crowd of crooks, dope-fiends and murderers that ever hit this city! You've probably forestalled one of the biggest robberies ever planned here. All by yourself! Man, I've seen people with nerve, but you take the cake!"

The old villain's unaccustomed ears tingled pleasantly at this laudation; and yet he didn't want it to come under false pretenses. He hadn't come to help the chief of police. He'd only wanted that horse.

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"They had my sorrel!" he complained.

"Sure. I know. I learned the whole thing. 'Ikey the Skull' came through with everything."

"The which?"

"Ikey the Skull—real name Horowotzky or something. New York gunman traveling west in a hurry. Cocain, robbery and back-street murder. He's meeting his Maker now in another ward. He told me the whole story. It seems he and his pals were making for the Coast and planned to blow a big safe here and then skip. They figured I'd watch the railroads, so they bought stock from some professional horse-thief and planned to vanish into the desert. Darned clever scheme. I'd never look for them there—not city thieves! It was blamed clever! And then you stepped in at just just the right time and shot up the whole thing!"

"I want my sorrel!" demanded the old rogue.

"You'll get it. It's over at the police stables, waiting for you."

Meantime, in the anteroom of the hospital, two men were pacing about the hard linoleum floor and arguing. One was C. Ellingwood Blount and the other was Judge Lawrence. Blount stormed, raged and swore. Certain things had been mighty hard to swallow, and he demanded that the old miscreant's punishments be painful and lingering. When the old judge finally had a chance to speak, Blount calmed down considerably.

"You—you mean he saved my bank?" he demanded, blankly.

"Certainly. It was all planned to blow the safe tonight. Judson walked over their nitroglycerin and spoiled the whole business. You ought to bless that old man-handler all your life!"

C. Ellingwood Blount mopped his brow and pondered deeply. While he was thinking things over the chief of police poked his head into the doorway. The chief had spoken of the judge to the old ruffian tactfully, hoping to smooth over the ancient differences between the two men; and at last he had gained a grudging success. When the judge arrived in the sick-room, old Bull glared up at the man with the white hair and dress suit, not without a certain hostility. Then he turned away.

"The chief says I ain't wanted no longer except for what I done today," he announced wearily. "Is that right, Tom?"

"That's correct, Bull. You've only to pay a few small fines—maybe they won't amount to anything—and then you're free as air."

The judge seated himself on the white bed and the old-timers looked into each other's eyes.

"Bull," said the judge, softly, "why not settle down and take things easy? You're welcome in Gila now. Why not come in and be civilized?"

The glare came into the old ruffian's cold eye again. Civilized! His mind visualized a long procession of arrogant policemen, insolent conductors, scurrilous taxi-drivers, offensive truckmen and haughty millionaires. He had seen enough of civilization!

"No, sir!" he snarled. "I'm goin' home! I'm goin' back among the miners and cactus and bobcats and rattlesnakes and horn-toads! Durn it, I'm goin' to some place where they got manners!"

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Prophecy of the Blind

By H A Lamb

A fool covers himself with cloth of gold and laughs; while a wise man sharpens his sword.

Ask a fool what is hidden within the temple wall, and he will answer, "Stone." But a blind man may see what is hidden. Aye, he will read what is not written by the hand of men.—Mohammedan proverb.

IT WAS on the road to Balkh that the boy was playing in the dirt. And down the road was trampling a herd of frightened buffaloes.

With my eyes, I, Abdul Dost, hereditary follower of Shirzad Mir, saw what came to pass. This was in the year 1608 of the Christian calendar.

The boy was very young and could not walk except when guided by a stronger hand. He was intent upon his play, facing us. His companion was the *kwajeh*—the holy man—Muhammed Asad, who sat upon a rock beside the road.

Muhammed Asad was blind.

The buffaloes, frightened by something down the road, were coming swiftly. And still the boy kept at his play, moving tiny sticks about in the dust. Muhammed Asad heard the beat of the animals' hoofs, but he could not see the danger to the child. I saw it, so likewise did Sir Weyand.

Sir Weyand, as I have said, was the *ferang*, the Englishman, who had joined me in the hill country of India. He was a man who acted quickly. Some men are readier at making words fly than at drawing a sword, but the *ferang* was not such.

In a second he was down from his horse and running toward the child. His stout legs flew through the dust, and as he ran he loosened his brown cloak. The buffaloes were very close.

Sir Weyand did not slacken his pace. It seemed to me as if he sprang among the running animals and snatched up the boy under one arm; with the other he waved the cloak.

It was a goodly sight—the broad *ferang* with both feet planted wide, his green cap with the feather on one side of his yellow curls and the cloak waving about his head.

The beasts could not stop, yet they parted in the middle and swept by the Englishman on both sides, bellowing and tossing their horns. The waving cloak had frightened them. In the dust that rose around him I could see the straight figure of the man. Yet why should Sir Weyand have put his life in risk for the sake of a mullah's child?

The buffaloes forced my horse aside, up the bank of the road. When they had passed I caught Sir Weyand's mount and reined down to him. The child was frightened and cried. At this, the holy man came toward us, feeling the way with his staff. The feelings of the blind are quickened by the affliction that God has laid upon them, and Muhammed Asad knew that the child had been in peril. He reached forward with his thin hand until he had touched the boy and made certain that no harm had come to him.

"Peace be unto you, Muhammed Asad," I greeted him, knowing the holy man.

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"And unto you be peace."

He asked what had passed, and when I told him he lifted blind eyes to heaven while Sir Weyand stared curiously at his lean face and venerable beard. "It is a blessing from the Prophet. Yet I have no gift to reward this deed."

Now I know not if the blessing of the *kwajeh* aided the *ferang*, who was an unbeliever. Still, he was a brave man and because of this and the strange events that followed I think the *kwajeh's* thanks bore fruit.

That was well, for it was the whim of Sir Weyand that had brought us here, on the way to Balkh, in grave peril. He had become wearied of the inactivity at the camp of Shirzad Mir, my master, where the hill tribes were gathered. Sir Weyand had made common cause with us after he was driven from the mogul's court by intrigues of Portuguese priests who were foes to the English.

"Idleness will breed defeat for us, Abdul Dost," he had said to me.

When I asked what else we might do, he laughed and said, "We ride to Balkh." This was a mad whim, for we were outlaws with the hand of the mogul against us. The plain of Badakshan was filled with the Uzbeks, our foes, and Balkh itself was a great city of trade with high walls. But his whim would not be denied.

"We saved our lives and that of Shirzad Mir by attacking when we were starved and lost and defeated. Now we will attack again. Shirzad Mir can not leave his men, but you, Abdul Dost, do you fear to come with me?"

When he said this I mounted my horse. Who can speak of fear to Adbul Dost, *mansabdar* of the dead Mogul Akbar—commanding officer of the Mogul army below Amira and best master of simitar in northern Ind?

Now Sir Weyand had been thinking as he watched the *kwajeh*, and thought with him led to deeds.

"It has been told me, Muhammed Asad," he spoke gravely, "that your priesthood have sight into the future. Is it so? Can you read me the future?"

"It is so with one who has fasted until the thread of life between soul and body is thin. What would you know?"

Thus came the prophecy of Muhammed Asad, written in the annals of Badakshan, from which befell the strange event at Balkh.

"A *ferang* is within the borders of Badakshan," answered Sir Weyand, speaking respectfully—for the *kwajeh* was loved of God— and motioning to me to be silent. "What is to be his fate in this moon?"

Muhammed Asad turned sightless eyes to him and to me. Then he took the hand of the boy and walked up the hillside, signing for us to follow. We dismounted and did so. A short distance away was a stream known to travelers along the caravan route to Balkh. By this Muhammed Asad halted. He released the child and felt his way to the water, where he knelt and performed his ablutions, as prescribed in the law.

I did likewise, for it was the hour of noonday prayer. Sir Weyand took the child on his knee and watched.

"BY YOUR tread—"Muhammed Asad turned to me when he was finished—"and by your voice it is clear that you are a warrior. Have you arrows?"

At his command I handed him a shaft from my quiver. This the *kwajeh* broke into two parts. He felt on the ground and took up a stick. This also he broke. Then he was silent in prayer with the sticks in his hand.

He chanted softly the sacred invocation:

"Allah ho Akbar, Allah ho Akbar.
Arsh haddu unlah Illah ka Illahah,
Arsh haddu unnah Mahomeda Razul Allah.
Hyah Allah S'allah,
Allah ho Akbar, Allah ho Akbar."

This was the blessing upon the name of the prophet. Verily, Muhammed Asad was holy and he had fasted long. It is given to few to dwell so near the thoughts of the other world.

He took the four sticks and tossed them into the air. Then he felt them as they lay on the ground.

"I heard it said in the bazaars of Balkh," he uttered, "that the *ferang* is the foe of Jani Beg, the Uzbek."

Again he laid his hands on the sticks. This time he turned to the *ferang*. Sir Weyand waited gravely. He had not meant to make sport of the holy man. If so, I should have drawn sword against him.

"A thought has come to me," spoke Muhammed Asad. "It is this. Within the moon the *ferang* shall be master of Jani Beg's stronghold."

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That was the prophecy. It seemed to please Sir Weyand. Truly, I took it for a good omen. But he conceived of another thing. Verily, his whim was strong upon him.

"Will you render me a service, Muhammed Asad?" he inquired.

The *kwajeh* bent his head.

"Ask, and I will do what I may. But I have nothing which I may give you for the act which saved the life of this boy that I found playing naked in the bazaar of Balkh."

Sir Weyand's cheeks reddened at this.

"It is not a gift," he said quickly. "You are going east where Jani Beg's forces lie?"

"Aye."

"Then go to the camp of the Uzbeks. Tell them of your prophecy. Will you do this?"

"If God wills," assented the holy man, "it shall be done."

"But do not say that you met with us."

Again Muhammed Asad agreed. It is the way of such men to be of service. I knew that he would do as he said. So, I think, did Sir Weyand. Yet I could not see how the tale would serve us.

Many things were not given to me to see. I saw not how two men and outlaws could make themselves masters of a walled city filled with foes. Never before or since in the annals of the moguls had this been done.

Sir Weyand was full of his new thought.

"Ho, Adbul Dost!" he cried, setting himself sidewise in his peaked saddle to look at me. "Abdul Dost of the somber countenance and the wary glance! Ho, *mansabdar* that was, leader of a thousand horsemen in battle, champion of the simitar, man of the moguls, sword-bearer of Badakshan——"

"Nay," I growled, though not ill-pleased, for Sir Weyand was a merry man.

"——Entitled to the rank of triple remount, veteran of fifty onsets—what think you, Abdul Dost, we will do now?"

"God alone knows," I made reply, for there was no telling what his whim might be. "Perhaps you seek to cut Jani Beg from his men. If so, your grave will soon be dug, for the Uzbeks are skilled soldiers."

"Nay; if that were so we are riding in the wrong direction. I have seen you play at chess, Abdul Dost, on a carpet by the evening camp-fire. In the mimic battle of the chess-board what is it you seek to do?"

"To capture the strong pieces of the enemy."

"Even so. Now what is the stronghold of Jani Beg?"

"Khanjut," I said bitterly, thinking of the fortress on the rock at the pass of Shyr that the Uzbeks had wrested from us.

Sir Weyand was thoughtful at this, but he shook his yellow curls.

"Nay, Abdul Dost. You, who are a soldier, think of a fortress. I, who am a merchant, a servant of my sovereign lady the queen, think otherwise."

Long after the events which were about to come had passed back into the abyss of time, I heard it said that when the Englishman spoke these words, his queen was dead and a new monarch sat the throne of the *khanate* of England. I know not. But Sir Weyand had been several years in reaching the hills of India and he had not heard from his own country for a long time.

"Think, Abdul Dost," he said; "what is the precious jewel in the turban of Jani Beg? What is the reservior from which he draws strength? And do you remember where the caravans pass from Kashgar to Persia, from Samarkand to India?"

"Balkh," I responded unwillingly, for Khanjut was the real citadel of Badakshan, holding as it did the stores of Jani Beg and controlling the pass into India.

"Balkh!" he cried. "What else? Balkh, the ancient mother of cities. Balkh, the walled town toward which we have turned our horses' heads. Truly, I have coveted Balkh for the space of a moon. And now we have met with Muhammed Asad, which is a brave omen."

"An omen will not give us men or weapons."

"Nay, but it will uplift our spirits." He threw back his sturdy head and laughed aloud, as a man will do who is proud of his strength. There was a twinkle in his gray eyes and his firm lips curled with delight. "You and I, Abdul Dost—the *mansabdar* and the merchant—we will capture Balkh."

Verily then I looked upon him as one who is light of wit. This was worse than I had thought.

"Nay," I said clearly; "that may not be."

Sir Weyand was but a merchant —although master of that long sword of his —while I was a leader of horsemen. How could two men seize a city, walled, and within the walls ten times a thousand men, all of whom carried swords? True, they

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were of every party and race—Sarts, Pathans, Persian merchants, hillmen, desertmen, and Ghils, but we were only two.

"What did Muhammed Asad prophesy?" he asked swiftly.

I had no answer to that, as the *kwajeh* was a holy man. Nevertheless, I had been thinking. Wise men in the mosques have said that a holy man who fasts can perceive the thoughts of others. Perhaps Muhammed Asad did but echo the thought he had caught from Sir Weyand.

"Be there many Uzbeks in Balkh?" he asked meditatively.

"Nay; they are in the field with Jani Beg. The people of Balkh are of every race."

"Then we will seize the city."

"God writes the future in the book of fate. But it is madness to seek to write therein ourselves."

Then I told him how Balkh was like a hub, a hub in the wheel of Badakshan. Its people were traders and were very wealthy. They cared little what master they served so long as the caravans came and went. And, like ants, the riders of Jani Beg scurried over the spokes of the wheel of Badakshan. He kept in touch with the wealthy city, although his forces were pinning Shirzad Mir to the hills in the east.

We were even then in danger of discovery and death, but Sir Weyand would not listen.

"We have had an omen, Abdul Dost. And, as for fate, did not Muhammed Asad make a prophecy?"

II

THUS did the mad whim of Sir Weyand lead us to Badakshan's great city of Balkh. It was useless to argue with him. He had the stubbornness of a wild ass and the quick wit of a falcon. When I said that Shirzad Mir had ordered me to keep him from danger, he asked if I was growing old, that I feared sharp sword-strokes. He cried that with the jewels and lakhs of rupees he had in his saddle-bags he would buy me a silk carpet from Ispahan and a soft wife from Persia to comfort my old age.

When I asked how we, who were but two, and marked men, could take a walled city, he made answer in curious fashion.

"In Cathay—" by which he meant the Han empire of China—"it is said there are dwarfs with two heads, one looking forward and one back. Thus their face will speak one tongue, and their back another. We will make ourselves two-headed and speak with two tongues. In this way we shall be masters of Balkh."

This was madness, and I made no answer except to say that there would then be four heads instead of two to place on spears at the gates of the city, when Jani Beg should hear of our folly. And I paid little heed to his questions about the two great gates of Balkh which are the only entrance through the walls, and the evil bazaars wherein the hillmen find their *bhang* and opium and women of Persia—also the distance from Balkh to the camp of Jani Beg. It was but a day's fast ride.

I liked the venture little, although I would have risked much to attack Khanjut, because Balkh was a city of trade; and what would the bazaars and the marble palace avail us, who even then were fugitives from the power of the mogul?

So I brooded as we rode to Balkh, keeping to the by-paths and riding at night. Sir Weyand still had a grain of sense, for he brought a dirty shepherd's *khalat* to put over his strange clothes, and a greasy turban which he bound over his cap with a grimace.

Thus it was at night that we entered the east gate of Balkh. There were no guards, for traders are slack in such matters. Nevertheless, the walls loomed over us like grim things of evil omen. No horse could jump them, and the gates could be closed.

We were like antelope walking into the nets of hunters. On each side of the gate I saw some dried heads hung in cages. Jani Beg was a hard master and he inspired submission by blood. A night-bird flew away at our approach.

At Sir Weyand's bidding, I led him to the bazaar quarter where are the caravansaries under the eastern wall. Here there were much light and noise. The curtains over the fronts of the shops were closed, but candle-light shone through them.

The caravansaries were aglow with torches, for many hillmen had brought in sheep and skins to trade—and to steal what they might. The mud-and-thatch taverns were tumultuous with merrymaking and the laughter of light women.

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Odors of musk, civet, stale wine and dirt crept into my nostrils. It was like a pen of animals. And we had come into the pen.

It did not displease Sir Weyand. I had thought that he would turn back when he saw the numbers that were in Balkh. But he gazed keenly at the figures that slipped past us in the shadows. And he dismounted at a tavern somewhat back from the others —a mere roof of cane, over some carpets on which many men lay drunk with wine of Shiraz cooled by snow brought from the mountains.

I loosened my scimitar and tethered the horses well in back of the place, as I knew it was a den of the hillmen where a man's life hangs lightly.

Still, I would not draw back, for his taunts had angered me and I had ceased to point out his folly.

Madder than ever he appeared that night. He stepped over the squatting Afghans and Ghils, heedless of the sharp looks they cast at us. The light from a few candles was bad, so they did not at first mark him for a *ferang*. Nevertheless, they were astir with curiosity and watched while he drank in the corner he had chosen and laughed as he pointed at the harlot that had brought him his wine. Beside her toddled a Khotanese dwarf—one of the wretches that dance in the bazaars to earn the leavings of wine and meat that are tossed to them.

"A second omen, Abdul Dost," he whispered.

"Nay; it is a misshapen thing. These men have marked us. Tomorrow the word of our coming will be through the bazaars."

"Know they your face?" he asked sharply. "Are there Uzbeks here? I do not think so."

"They are not Uzbeks—" I glanced covertly around the place—"but they are masterless men who would cut your throat for a single jewel of those you carry." As I spoke, I noticed a hillman watching us. "There is one who knows me. Kur Asaf, a low-born Ghil whose name is thievery, who is an evil snake, a toad, who can not frame a word but it is a lie——"

"Good," he broke in. "Summon him hither."

If I had needed further proof of his folly, here it was. Given a glimpse of the coins and jewels the *ferang* carried, and we should not live to be staked on Jani Beg's spears. Kur Asaf would slit our throats and bury us in the mud behind the bazaars.

"Eh," he grinned as he squatted in front of us, with two yellow teeth showing through his thin mustache.

"Peace be upon the worthy Abdul Dost," he muttered unctuously—he had never taken off his shoes within a temple. "What brings the *mansabdar* to Balkh, which is the city of Jani Beg?"

I would have answered sharply, but Sir Weyand pressed my knee with his arm.

"Spoil, Kur Asaf," he smiled back.

The Ghil—may his ancestors have sorrow from his knavery—drank a bowl of rank wine to hide his surprise at sight of the *ferang*. I think he had never seen such a man before.

"There is spoil to be had in Balkh, Kur Asaf," repeated Sir Weyand.

The hillman was at a loss. He could not guess what lay behind Sir Weyand's words, nor why I should be with him. His curiosity grew, and the mention of loot was like added brush to a fire.

Then Sir Weyand, before I could prevent, plucked out a double handful of silver coins with several good diamonds and showed them to Kur Asaf.

"Here is some," he said softly, "and we will gain more. I am a merchant and I will not waste my time without profit. Abdul Dost says that you are a shrewd man. Doubtless you have followers in the bazaars."

Kur Asaf drew a long breath at sight of the money. He peered at Sir Weyand keenly. Truly, he knew not what to think. Nor did I—save that my friend must be mad.

"Ten score," he said, and lied. Perhaps he had two score. He was a power among the thieves.

"Good." Sir Weyand leaned close to him, in spite of the smell. "I find you to my liking. Come here after sunset tomorrow night, and we will talk together, you and I. There will be spoil for you."

The Ghil looked knowing, but he was as much at a loss as I. He could not believe the good fortune that had brought Sir Weyand to his hand for the plucking. I think he suspected we were spies for Shirzad Mir. Yet the thought was strong upon him that we might have betrayed Shirzad Mir and joined Jani Beg.

"Say nothing of our coming to other than your own men," I cautioned him, thus arousing his curiosity further.

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"We are not strangers to Jani Beg," added Sir Weyand calmly.

Was there ever such a man? It was all I could do to keep from a grunt of surprize. I looked wise, yearning for a chance to speak alone with Sir Weyand.

This mystified the Ghil the more.

"It shall be done," he said at length.

"Good," echoed the *ferang*, and handed him a large diamond. He put it in a fold of his turban, looking around to be sure he was not observed.

As he left the tavern, Kur Asaf spoke briefly with some of the hillmen. I guessed that he told them to watch us, and not to harm us until he should order it. Verily, we must have aroused his curiosity.

"Kur Asaf," Weyand said thoughtfully, "will not lift weapon against us until he knows for certain what master we serve. Likewise, Abdul Dost, is it not true that he will keep the other thieves from us until then?"

He was a shrewd man, my comrade, but he had the *ferang's* intolerance of robber folk which I did not share, being wise in those matters.

Whereupon he said that he would sleep. Later, he added, I might do so, for I would need my strength presently. He fell into slumber while I meditated upon what had passed. I could not tell head from tail of the matter. Nevertheless, it was clear that Sir Weyand was acting upon a plan. And from this I took some comfort, not knowing at that time the gigantic folly of what was in his mind.

AS HE had ordered. I slept for some hours after he had wakened at dawn. Being a little wearied by the ride and more by the heat of the place, I did not arouse until after the midday prayers.

We were alone in the tavern, although men came from time to time to look in on us, and I guessed they were friends of Kur Asaf who wished to satify their curiosity. Our plight was that of a bullock bound.

"We will take Balkh, you and I," he said idly.

"How?" I asked.

He had no answer save a jest.

"Have you forgotten your own words? You said, Abdul Dost, that if we had two heads and they were set on the gate-posts, we would face two ways."

B'illah—he angered me! He would say no more, only cautioning me to help him make Kur Asaf believe we had much wealth to reward the Ghils with. Truly, this mattered little, for the Ghils would cut our throats as readily for a single silver coin as for many.

"Is it your thought," I asked, "that with the score of thieves we may take Balkh? That may not be. The townsmen, although merchants, are like dogs that lick the sandals of Jani Beg. And they are ten thousand with swords."

"We will not strike a sword-stroke," he made reply. Then I knew he must be touched with madness. He threw off his *khalat* and the greasy turban and washed himself. I did likewise, wishing to perform my lawful ablutions before the angel of death summoned me. Then he slumbered, and I watched until after the evening meal and sunset prayers. I heard the *mullahs* call the holy words, and the sound was as welcome as a mountain breeze in the filth of the bazaars. With darkness came various painted women and the dwarf. Guitars and tambours struck up around us. Still our tavern was empty of men, which I took for a bad sign.

Then came Kur Asaf, swaggering, and squatted down on the carpets in front of the *ferang*. With him entered a score of men—I counted thirty, and well armed—who stared at my comrade.

Kur Asaf waited for Sir Weyand to speak the first word. I, likewise, waited, being angry. When he spoke it was not what I thought.

"Have you kettle-drums?" he asked sharply. The words had the ring of an order. Kur Asaf growled that the drums might be bought in the bazaars. Sir Weyand tossed one of the Ghils money, and the man went out.

The men pressed closer at this, but Sir Weyand did not look up, nor did he move. This impressed them and they fell to talking among themselves. Their curiosity was great. Also, they were afire to learn how they could gain the more spoil—by robbing us here, or robbing others for us and keeping the reward for themselves. God has sown naught but evil thoughts in the hearts of Ghils, although they are bold men after a fashion.

They stirred and scratched uneasily as the silence grew. They were slender, dark-

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faced folk, dirty of dress, yet with excellent weapons. Jani Beg had many in his army, as he paid well.

"I have come as I promised," uttered Kur Asaf when the drums were brought. "And here be my men. What have you to offer us?"

"Are you afraid to take a risk?"

"Nay," replied the Ghil complacently; "we have no fear."

"Then I will divide among you a lakh of rupees and diamonds—one to each man. Also a handful of pearls to the one that bears my message to Shirzad Mir. You will be paid when our task is finished."

I pricked up my ears at this. As for the Ghil, he was more mystified than before. First Sir Weyand had spoken the name of Jani Beg. Now he named Shirzad Mir. The men of Balkh—even the hillmen—were little better than driven dogs that fawn upon a master. Aye, that is the curse of India—save for the Rajputs and mayhap the Pathans—that they are born to feel the yoke of a master. Kur Asaf dared not offend an envoy of Jani Beg, lord of ten thousand Uzbek swords, nor did he desire the enemity of Shirzad Mir, who loosened the arrows of vengeance swiftly, and might again be in power as he once had been.

"This is the message," continued the *ferang* before the other could meditate fully upon the matter, "to be delivered by word of mouth. It is that Shirzad Mir should pick twenty-five score good riders and come by night to the ravine just north of the great well of Ghori."

Now, the three places of Balkh, Khanjut and the camp of Shirzad Mir make a triangle—such as is used by the astrologers—a triangle with the sides equal. And the camp of my master lay to the east of the triangle. Khanjut was to the south, and Balkh to the west.

The ravine north of the well of Ghori was just in the center of the three points. So much I knew.

"Say to Shirzad Mir," added the *ferang*, "that I, Sir Weyand, send the message. He is to be at this place of meeting by the third watch of tomorrow night. He must not fail. By this sign he will know the message is true."

The Englishman took from his hand a ring Shirzad Mir had given him. It was a fine sapphire. Also, he dropped into the claw of the Ghil three small pearls.

"The rider who carries the word," he explained, "will have twice this number of pearls when I rejoin him at the well of Ghori."

The thought came to me that the rider would not take the message to Shirzad Mir, but to the Uzbeks, and claim a greater reward. Sir Weyand's next words showed that he had reasoned upon this also.

"The rider must go swiftly, for this matter affects Jani Beg." He lowered his voice, but not so the others could not hear. "Jani Beg's men will be in Balkh by nightfall on the morrow. There will be a tumult in Balkh, Kur Asaf, and those who are nimble of wit will not lose thereby. Aye, blood will be shed at the gates and spoil taken in the bazaars. Much hangs upon this—even the power of the mogul."

By now Kur Asaf was groping for the meaning of this in darkness. How was he to know what we were? The *ferang's* words had hinted we were traitors to Shirzad Mir. Our presence in Balkh seemed to confirm this, yet the message was to Shirzad Mir.

I, also, was puzzled. Perhaps Sir Weyand meant but to deceive the Ghils. Yet why had he appointed a meeting-place with my master?

Kur Asaf whispered to one of his men and gave him two pearls. The other he kept for himself. I have keen ears and I overheard him say to deliver the message as he had heard it if he would keep his hide whole.

The Ghil scented mighty deeds, and his greed was inflamed. Whatever happened, he could slay Sir Weyand and me and take our wealth. At the same time he was sure he was aiding either Shirzad Mir or Jani Beg—he thought the Uzbeks.

Sir Weyand allowed him no time to meditate further.

"Ho, Kur Asaf," he cried, rising and stretching himself, "are you a man for a daring deed? Do you fear to take plunder from these fat swine of merchants? Will you join forces with me and Abdul Dost?"

Will a jackal go to the smell of meat? The Ghil's small eyes gleamed. He would come with us, he said. Verily, he did not want to let us escape from his sight with the lakh of rupees.

"Good!" cried the *ferang* with his broad smile. "Then choose a dozen of your men.

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They must ride a circuit around Balkh with break of day. They must make a chain in the plain without the walls and keep back any that seek to leave the town from dawn until dark."

This promised well and the Ghil did as he was directed, counting off and dismissing twelve of his rascals. This left sixteen in the tavern.

These Sir Weyand divided into two equal groups.

"What is it you seek to do?" asked Kur Asaf shrewdly.

"Soon you will see. Remember I do this for one who is greater than I. You and I, Kur Asaf, will take the kettle-drums and go to the eastern gate. The other party, under Abdul Dost, will seek the western gate. There are but two. Then we will seize the gates."

I stared, and the Ghils grunted their surprize. But I was more surprized than they. Seize the gates of Balkh! When we were no better than outlaws! When a day would bring an armed party from the Uzbeks to cut us down—

But Sir Weyand had me by the arm.

"You will act as follows, Abdul Dost," he said loudly. "When you are at the west gate, close it so only one man can slip through. Station men outside and within. Remain without, yourself. To those who approach Balkh from the plain say that Shirzad Mir has captured the city. To the townspeople within, say that Jani Beg has closed the gates for two nights and a day."

His stern face became harder as he spoke.

"Slay any who try to force the gate!" he ordered. Then, sinking his voice as he strode to the door of the tavern: "Take your horse. Keep him near. Send messages by the outer riders to me as long as all is well. By nightfall on the morrow you will hear shots. Mount at once and ride through the town to me. Cut down any who get in your way."

His grip on my arm tightened.

"Ho," he whispered, "we are playing with death this night, you and I, Abdul Dost. But we shall be masters of Balkh."

"Nay," I whispered, thinking swiftly of many dangers.

"These be orders, Adbul Dost!" he cried roughly. "Go to your post!"

The Ghils looked at me mockingly, and I went.

III

IS ANY plight so uneasy as that of a man on outpost who knows not what goes on in his rear? Verily, he is like a blind, led horse which hears the noise of battle but can not see.

And I, at the west gate of Balkh, heard battle drawing close and smelled blood in the dusty air. Aye, for at dawn people began to approach the gate. The cry of the *müezzin* had scarce silenced when women appeared in the hamlets without the walls, bearing jars to the wells; burdened donkeys passed here and there; a barking of dogs resounded, and now and then the song of a witless girl.

Aye, I smelled danger and my heart closed upon itself heavily.

We had no trouble in holding the gate. Some travelers came first on camels from the plain. These turned back in alarm when I cried that Shirzad Mir had taken Balkh. They gave the news to the hamlets, so that the women and children and donkeys began to flee away from us.

But within the walls there was more confusion and outcry. Throngs gathered in the roadway when the Ghil, standing just inside the wooden gate where I could hear what passed, said that Jani Beg had ordered the walls of the city closed.

So the high walls of Balkh were closed. The townspeople dared not force an outlet through us, fearing the name of the Uzbeks who held the reins of power in Badakshan. After a while came sundry *kwajehs* and high merchants who questioned the Ghils. They responded as I ordered that Jani Beg had done this thing, and they must wait until after nightfall, when a party would come from the Uzbek camp to learn the why of it.

Said I not it was the fate of my people to bend the neck to a master—even to the invading Uzbeks? The Ghils swaggered, and the townspeople did not doubt—at first. In time they did so, but in time many strange things came to pass.

Then came a caravan from Herat. To them we told the same tale. Our outriders must have told Sir Weyand, at the other gate, of the caravan, for the kettle-drums—which are a sign of authority—struck up loudly, and there was a great outcry.

The merchants withdrew. I saw several horsemen leave their party and strike off, around the city. I judged that they went

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to seek Jani Beg. Yet others must have gone before them with the news. Jani Beg would pay well for tidings that Shirzad Mir was in Balkh.

One of the Ghil outriders galloped up and told me that men had left to inform the nearest Uzbeks of what had happened before dawn. He asked if this was what we wished.

"How should it be otherwise?" I responded, putting on a bold face. "A wise man reads the writing of fate."

The man trotted off to think this over.

Thus it was that we two held the gates of Balkh. It was clear now what Sir Weyand had said about our faces being turned two ways. To the people of Balkh we seemed men of Jani Beg. To those outside we were sentries of Shirzad Mir. To the Ghils we were a mystery.

Aye, the sun climbed high and the herders brought their flocks but did not try to enter the city to the market. And we held the gates of Balkh.

At intervals the kettle-drums echoed. It was a feast-day, and the noise within did much to convince those who watched from the plain that a party of Shirzad Mir was in truth in Balkh. Sir Weyand's orders—so said the Ghils who were watching the streets—had encouraged the celebration of the feast.

Presently one of the Ghils approached me where I sat by my horse and salaamed.

"The *ferang*," he said covertly, "has sent a message to you. He asks what Jani Beg will do when he hears the news."

This speech smelled strongly of a lie. It was the Ghils, not Sir Weyand, who were waxing curious. I pondered the matter for the space milk takes to boil.

"Tell the *ferang*," I made answer, "that Jani Beg will turn his horse's head to Balkh with the pick of his followers. Others he will leave to watch the rebel, Shirzad Mir. Still others he will send with his important stores to the citadel of Khanjut. There they will be safe while his army is removed, for Khanjut is impregnable. It is written that while water flows in the rivers of Badakshan, Khanjut will not be taken by siege."

Thus I put in his ear a small grain of truth that left him none the wiser. Yet as it proved, my judgment was true. I spoke bitterly, for the man's words had made clear that the Ghils were becoming doubtful of us. And by now the Uzbeks must be on the march toward Balkh. The Uzbeks are good fighters and ride swiftly. They would not be long in coming. And what was to become of us when they arrived?

I knew not. I sat by my horse and waited while the hours passed. Smoke appeared in the sky overhead. Looking through the opening in the gate, I saw the Khotan dwarf running about among the legs of the watching townspeople and heard him cry that the Ghils had set fire to the bazaar.

By now the outriders on the west of the town had assembled and drawn in to the gate. They talked with those of my party and looked at me.

"The Uzbeks—many hundreds of armored riders— have been sighted nearing Balkh," they said to me, and waited.

"Said I not they would come?"

But the Ghils were not content. They had had time to think. By now they had satisfied themselves that we—Sir Weyand and I—were not of the Uzbek party. And they were growing frightened lest Jani Beg should cut their heads from their shoulders.

I read their thoughts as clearly as a black stone shows through shallow water. They had assembled outside the gate to prevent me from escaping. They planned doubtless to slay us and take the *ferang's* money. Or perhaps to bind us prisoners and deliver us to Jani Beg for torture. I think if Kur Asaf had been at the west gate, swords would have been drawn by now. Yet Sir Weyand's wisdom had kept the leader of the Ghils with him, and without a leader they were slow to act against such a swordsman as I.

Still was my heart sick as the long shadows began to fall across the brown plain of Balkh.

My back was itching to be up and join Sir Weyand. It would not be long before both of us would stand before the dark angel of death, for Sir Weyand still did not give the signal, and each moment was closing the toils of the hunters about him, taking him between the oncoming Uzbeks and the Ghils. As for me, I had my orders, and never have I broken my word in order to turn my back upon peril.

I bade the Ghils fetch me clean water, and I made my ablutions. They gathered around me like vultures sitting beside a

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dying horse. They dared to laugh at me, sitting beside my mount. Some of the townspeople stared from the walls.

The men of Balkh had recognized the *ferang* by now, from the walls, and I think if it had not been for the conflagration in the bazaar they would have slain us.

No man likes to look full into the pathway of death, as it opens before him. Few would have sat still as I did and waited while the shadows came closer to the walls, and twilight drew a veil over the plain.

"The Uzbeks have been sighted from the east wall, Abdul Dost," said one of the Ghils mockingly.

"Jani Beg will be well pleased to see you," added another, fingering his sword.

"There will be new heads in the cages," spoke up a third.

They edged closer, looking one at the other like curs ready to .spring—if one would make the first move.

I said nothing, watching them while the glow from the fire began to light the sky overhead. My ears were pricked for sound of the shot Sir Weyand had promised, but it did not come.

"The mogul loves not traitors," gibed one. "Is he the master you named?"

I heard a stir on the wall above the gate. The Ghils looked up uneasily, and then a shot sounded.

IT IS no easy feat to spring from a seat on the ground to the back of a horse, yet this is what I did that same instant.

The Ghils snatched at their swords and spread around me so that I could not ride through to the plain. This was a mistake. I wheeled my mount on two legs round to the gate and spurred through it.

Two there were who struck at me as I passed. They did not strike twice. I am not an ill master of the simitar.

The gate was wide enough to win through. Surprize at my sudden move had kept the Ghils back, but now they were after me with loud cries.

Nevertheless I had a start of half a bow-shot, and my horse was a good one. The people in the streets drew back hastily, and I kept well ahead of the Ghils, past the palace of Balkh, past the *registan* and the market-place, to the farther side of the town.

It was good to be in saddle again with a sword in my hand. I rose in my stirrups and cried loudly, and the men of Balkh gave way to stare and curse. In the dusk they could not see my face.

The glow from the fire grew stronger, showing me dark packs of thieves who were looting the bazaar where the flames had not yet come. The painted women were running about in fright. More than one body was in the alleys.

By this light I saw Sir Weyand as I neared the gate.

He was standing with his back to it, his long sword bare in his hand. He was fronting the Ghils who ringed him about. One lay on the earth—one that I judged to be Kur Asaf. But the Ghils had Sir Weyand's horse. The sweat was shining on his face, and he was smiling as he fenced with two of the rascals, who were not over-anxious to try the taste of his long sword.

Yet he had an eye for what went on around him.

"Ho, Abdul Dost," he cried angrily, as his blade made play, "you are late—almost—" the Ghils drew back at the sound of horse's hoofs—"too late."

Uncertainty in a battle is a two edged sword. The Ghils did not know who were on the horses they heard. When they saw me and others behind me they sprang back warily. Men of that breed are ever mindful of their own skins.

"To me, Abdul Dost!" cried the *ferang* impatiently.

I spurred forward, while he pulled at the gate to open it. An angry shout came from the pursuers behind me, and the Ghils plucked up heart. A pistol echoed from near at hand—then another.

My horse quivered under me and stumbled. He had been hit and sorely hurt. I sprang from the saddle, lest he fall upon me, and he ran to one side, neighing and plunging blindly as he went. It was a stroke of bad luck.

The Ghils were running toward us now, mounted and afoot, taking courage from the fact that we were but two and unhorsed. I could hear Sir Weyand's heavy breathing. The scene was bright with the flames at one side of the gate, but on the outer side of the wall darkness reigned.

"The Uzbeks are within bow-shot of the gate," the *ferang* called to me, and I thought that our fate had come upon us.

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But he wasted no time in thought. Plucking the pistol from my girdle, he discharged it at the nearest Ghil who coughed and dropped to his knees.

"*Shirzad el kadr.*" Sir Weyand cried our battle-shout, and I echoed it, turning with bared weapon to face the Ghils. A third shout came from the Uzbeks at some distance on the farther side of the wall.

Verily, it was a tight place. The Ghils were coming forward slowly, being wary lest we have another pistol. I felt a tug at my arm. Without turning, I stepped back one pace and then another.

I felt my shoulders scrape through what seemed to be beams of wood. Then the light and the Ghils were blotted out in darkness.

Sir Weyand had opened the wooden gate enough to slip through and had pulled me after him. Then he had closed the gate. He was a strong man.

Said I not it was dark without the wall? We were in its shadow. But the glow from the flaming bazaar lit up the countryside faintly.

I saw a body of horsemen coming along the road at a walk. And behind them the light glittered on hundreds of spears and swords. Among the leaders I thought I saw the broad figure of Jani Beg.

They could not see us, for we were in the blackness of the wall. All they had seen was that two men on foot had appeared for an instant in the crack of the door, and they had other things to think about. They thought that Shirzad Mir and his men were in Balkh.

Aye, they came forward slowly. They were no cowards, but within the wall where a tumult echoed might be the army of Shirzad Mir. Meanwhile Sir Weyand and I were running to one side, keeping in the gloom of the wall.

My lungs were near to bursting with the effort, when Sir Weyand checked me. The gate of Balkh was opening slowly. We could not see it pulled back, but we saw the light grow as it opened.

Slowly, slowly the square of the gate became light. I had no great fear that the Ghils would rush out. They could not wish to face the angry Jani Beg.

But the leading Uzbeks halted their horses, and I heard a mutter spread through their ranks. And the skin grew cold along my spine.

In the red light of the fire a figure appeared in the gate of Balkh. It strutted and cried and gibbered. It laughed wildly and fell to dancing.

There in the roadway was the dwarf of Khotan, inspired by the madness of what was happening. The red flames flickered on his grotesque figure as he flung his arms about in the dance.

We did not linger to watch. When we had gained the bushes where the conflagration no longer lighted us we ran toward one of the hamlets near the wall.

I knew the place, by the will of God. And before an hour had passed I had found two good horses which we paid for with jewels.

By now there was a cry raised after us from within Balkh, and the Uzbek riders were out seeking us.

But it was not our fate that we should die that night. The stars were bright overhead and we left Balkh behind us, feeling the fresh night air in our faces.

"Ride to the well of Ghori!" said Sir Weyand harshly. "We are late. Shirzad Mir is waiting for us. As I thought, the prophecy of Muhammed Asad and the news from Balkh has brought Jani Beg and his army hither, but ride! Eh, Abdul Dost, we must be in Ghori by midnight!"

By sheep-paths and cuts through the plain I took him to Ghori and past that village to the well. Was this not my own country? At places we were seen. Yet the villagers had love for Shirzad Mir in their hearts, and they speeded us on.

It did not seem fitting that we should kill two horses in needless haste, yet when I said this to Sir Weyand—now that our skins were safe—he stormed at me. Aye, so I fell silent, and rode in the dark without regard to beast or man.

Once we gained a remount at a friendly village. By this, and the hand of God, we passed the well of Ghori at midnight. We passed the well and drew up at a sharp challenge beyond.

The challenge had come in our own tongue, and I answered gladly. A rider came out of the shadows and led us on our quivering horses to where Shirzad Mir and his *ameers* and *mansabdars* sat their horses at a cross-road. Along the road the men of Shirzad Mir to the number of more than a thousand sat by their mounts, ready and waiting.

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My master had kept the time and place of the meeting. Likewise he held prisoner the Ghil we had sent.

And then I saw that I had been blind. Aye, for Sir Weyand and Shirzad Mir talked together the space of a moment and the whole of our men were set in motion. With Sir Weyand at our head we went forward at a fast trot, which is the most swiftly a body of men can move in the night.

What we did that night is written in the annals of Badakshan. We rode until the morning mists were turning gray with dawn and we could see one another's eyes. We rode away from Balkh while the army of Jani Beg held that city. We rode to Khanjut.

Aye, we entered the citadel of Badakshan, the stronghold of our country, at dawn. The gates were open for the scattered parties of Uzbeks who were bringing in the stores, the bulkier treasure and the women of Jani Beg. At Khanjut none suspected we were anywhere save at Balkh.

In the mists we entered Khanjut, the citadel on the rock that has never been taken by storm. This was what Sir Weyand had planned.

And then a thought came to me. I spoke of the thought to Shirzad Mir, who gave praise to the mercy of God; and I spoke likewise to Sir Weyand, who laughed, after his fashion, and said nothing.

My thought was that the prophecy of Muhammed Asad had come true.

New England's

by C. E. TERRY

FOR sons were bred on thy rockland head
And reared at thy valleys' breast,
That in field and mart bore thy granite heart
When ye sped them on your quest.

Far from thy call we've wandered,
Skirted the cañon's brim.
Gutted the North of its treasures,
Starved on the desert's rim.

Bald were the peaks we scaled then,
Sheerest the depths below,
Wracking the jungle fever,
Blasting the blue-white snow.

Many the loves that lured us—
Fame, women, gold and gin;
Winding the trails we followed—
Each to his fav'rite sin.

Strange were the gods that beckoned
Away from thy lessons stern—
Empty their fairest promise,
As each of thy sons must learn.

* * * * * *

Cleansed in the sear of striving—
Forest and field and main
Conquered—thy tempered children
Hearken thy call again.

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Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOME more about Billy the Kid and Wild Bill from one of us whose letterhead has printed on it: "Wing over Wing; Loop the Loop; Upside Down Flying; Wing Slides; Vertical Drop; Tail Slides; Corkscrew Drop."

HENDERSON, KY.

From 1903 to 1906 I punched cattle in southeastern New Mexico and was acquainted with an old chap, Uncle Pat Brady by name, and he used to tell me stories of old-timers and gunmen he had known. He mentioned having seen Wild Bill Hickok, at San Antone, Texas, two or three times, but stated that he (Wild Bill) seldom came farther south than Abilene, Kansas.

BILLY the Kid, so I was informed, was a product of the Lincoln County war. Eddy, now Carlsbad, N. M., was one of his stamping-grounds. Billy the Kid, so far as I could learn, was the inventor or originator of the trick of presenting his guns butt-forward in token of surrender and at the same time retaining his hold on the gun or guns with his gun-finger through the trigger-guard, then, when his adversary reached for the gun, pivoting it on his gun finger and firing. He was killed at Roswell, N. M., I believe, and, according to Uncle Pat's story, in this manner: Pat Garrett, the sheriff, learning that the Kid had a young Mexican woman that he visited at night, went to the woman's home, made her allow him to lie in bed with her and, when the Kid came into the room, shot him dead without warning.

Several years since Garrett was shot and killed at or near El Paso, Texas, and I have heard a number of old-timers say that he got what was coming to him.—BAXTER ADAMS.

Mr. Adams also sends Camp-Fire a poem, by way of thanks for its having put him on the trail of several old friends, among them Melville Ross, "who was injured while flying

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for Britain. By the way, do you know where he now is? We both learned flying at the Curtiss land flying-school at North Island, San Diego, California in 1914."

As to the poem, the mule undoubtedly has weak spots of character or disposition but on the whole I think there are many of you who will endorse him as a "real person." One of us has written a poem to him; let the rest of us join in and drink to the mule's best health, even if Prohibition has made it impossible to do so in the way he peculiarly deserves—with something with a kick in it.

An Ode to the Mule

THEY call you a jackass, an onery beast;
Cuss you and maul you until you're deceased;
Gear you up at early morn,
Working you hard till the sun is gone;
Hitch you on to a heavy load,
Expect you to haul it on any old road;
And all you get at the best of it
Is a "Damn you, Tobe!" or a jerk of the bit.

It's a lucky day when you are tired
If the road is smooth and you don't get mired.

In days now gone when the West was new,
Indians many and settlers few,
When they hauled their freight they depended on you.
Now they talk of tractors and motor-cars.
And send you to France to be killed in the wars.
In Flanders fields where heroes fell
They loaded you down with shrapnel shell
And sent you through mud that alone was hell
While all you got at the best of it
Was a "Damn you, Tobe!" or a jerk of the bit.

—BAXTER ADAMS.

I'LL say they are. Of all the peoples our boys met and fought beside in the great war most of them seem to like the Australians and New Zealanders best, with the Canadians almost neck and neck. But I'll say they are. Maybe that's one reason why our boys liked them, being pretty strong themselves when it comes to josh, spoof, bull and otherwise large talk. Just listen to this Australian comrade! But we like him, don't we?

Bowaderry, New South Wales, Australia.

I want to throw my blanket down by your Camp-Fire and hold out my hand and say, "Can I join up?"

HAVING no one to give me a "knock down," I must introduce myself. I'm an Australian, born in the State of New South Wales, and though you might as well try to roll a snow-ball into —— as to get up an adventure like I've read in your magazine, or get a man here to pull a gun on another man—the whole police force together with the relations of the man (to the third and fourth generation) would be on your heels, and you'd be handed a "Kathleen Mavourneen"—it may be for years or may be forever. Yet we're no "Willies" (a term meaning an effeminate man). You remember when the Kaiser unbuckled the belt band of Eternity, we landed at the Dardanelles. My kid, nineteen years of age, fought his way with his mates through that surf and up those hills and made Von der Goltz a liar when he said "It couldn't be done." We never turned our backs in France.

I just mention these things lest you may think us soft because we've not got a notch on our gun, or mixed it in gun-play with a wild and woolly greaser, or got on speaking terms with a grizzly, or stood with a handkerchief in our mouths and a knife in our hands inviting some one to write on a bit of paper what they'd have on their tombstone before they took hold of the other end of a handkerchief. Yet, as I said, we are no Willies. I repeat this lest some chap of the Kit Carson type may want to offer me his hand in holy matrimony.

WE CAN ride, and I've never met the cowboy who could put it over an Australian at the buck-jumping game. In a contest between a cowboy with a lassoo and an Australian who rode at his beast, threw it by the butt of the tail, and hog-tied, the Australian won out with 5 to 3.

While I'm on this buck-jumping business, Angus McManus says there never was such a thing as a trained buck-jumper. Shades of Wallace! I hate to tell a Scot that he handles the truth very carelessly, for our soldiers have nothing but praise for the Scotties with whom they fought in France, but man Angus! I know a trained buck-jumper that will buck nine times out of every five. He travels with a show, and has been at it for the past three years. He can throw the whole Ten Commandments one after another, and the only hope one would have of staying on his back in a park saddle—we bar Mexican saddles and stock saddles with big knee-pads (they're for girls)—would be to cut a nick in his forehead and let him buck through the slit and leave the rider on his hide.

WE'VE got no big game to hunt. Foxes there are in thousands on our stations—ranches you call them. They were introduced by some fool Englishman for sport, and, like the rabbits, they are a curse. We run them down on horse-back (with a gun). Have got five in two hours. Kangaroos there are in thousands, but they are as harmless as lemon squash. Rabbits exist in millions, and shooting them is like taking corn out of a blind parrot's cage. All one has to do is to sit behind a bush, make a noise like a cabbage, and then catch the rabbits as they line up for cabbage.

SO YOU see, we have no adventures to compare with yours over there, and the only long suit I hold to give me a footing at the Camp-Fire is that I'm an Australian. I could tell some yarns—so tame that they'd feed out of one's hand—of our country, of our sheep-dog, that can drive a blow-fly with one wing pulled off into a gun barrel one hundred yards away, or yard newly hatched chickens back into their shell; of our cattle-dogs that can bite twice without letting go; of our trees so tall that it would strain the barrel of a gun shooting at a bird in the

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top of them; of our horses that can travel fearsome journeys, doing the distance between sunrise and sundown in two and one-half hours, and no short cuts; of our blacks who are such adepts at tracking that they can tell where you spit last week, or track an ant up a corn-stalk; of the come-back boomerangs they throw, of our shearers who can peel the fleeces off so fast and spear the sheep down the "shute" so quickly, an outsider would think they were playing leap-frog.

I could tell of these things, but it wouldn't be like the derring-do deeds in *Adventure*.

However, if you will have me at your Camp-Fire let me know. I may be able to call forth a smile from the men who have seen and done things. In any case good luck.—E. READ.

BY WAY of introducing himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine, Charles N. Webb tells us something about the real things back of "A Triumphant Journey." When his letter came I ought to have written him and explained that what Camp-Fire really expects when a new man joins our writer's brigade is a personal word about himself, but I failed to do so, so I am to blame, not Mr. Webb, who after all falls into the essential spirit of the occasion.

Lancaster, Wis.

The central incident in "A Triumphant Journey" is not fictitious. It happened nearly as described in a town on the Mesabi range where I was working on an evening paper three years ago. An old-timer gave most of his Winter's wages to aid a brother woodsman who had been crippled in an accident on a logging railroad.

THE old-timers are rapidly disappearing from the woods. The men who went in in the Fall and came out in the Spring, who held their jobs because of physical fitness, and who had the utmost contempt for a man who "toted whisky to the push" are becoming rarer each season. Those I have run across in the logging-camps and the Northern Minnesota towns were mostly camp foremen or, at least, straw bosses. Occasionally one encounters a veteran, like *Patty O'Toole*, who is employed as a common woodsman.

The old-timers I have known were one and all foes of the I. W. W. I was working in the woods when the "Reds" were carrying on a very vigorous agitation which in that immediate section failed to hamper the work of logging to any considerable extent. Later, when I was employed as a reporter, an I. W. W. agitator who called himself the "Timber-beast," did manage to get a few hundred lumber-jacks to leave their work and join him in a demonstration in the town I happened to be in.

The men went back to work in a few days, however, and, as nearly as I could ascertain, the strike was a failure. Whatever reason the lumber-jacks may have had for a strike in the past, it seemed to me that they had the slightest that season when wages were higher than they had been for years and living conditions better.—CHARLES N. WEBB.

STILL another cure for snake-bite. Camp-Fire is always glad to hear these cures, but of course no responsibility is assumed for any of them. We are just a company gathered together, any one of us can offer a suggestion or advice, and all the others listen, each passing judgment for himself and acting accordingly.

Pascagoula, Miss.

There is one remedy for snake-bites which I have not seen mentioned in *Adventure*. It was given me by a California ranchman and miner and vouched for as a sure and speedy cure. He says he always carried a bottle of ammonia and in case he was bitten by a poisonous snake he immediately washed the wound with the ammonia and also put a little of it in water or whisky and drank it. He says he has used that remedy times enough so he knows it is a sure cure and without any after ill effects.—C. E. WALTER.

FROGS. Can you talk to a frog? That surely is a new subject for Camp-Fire. But if comrade Crippen is a liar I belong in the same class, for I know from personal experience that there's something in this frog thing.

VANCOUVER, B. C.

Say, I'd like to tell you something about frogs, but I'm afraid you might think I was having a pipe dream. Did you ever see American bull-frogs that measured twenty inches from nose to tip of hind legs? I had some this big; one was stuffed and on exhibit in the Idaho building at San Francisco fair. Did you ever know frogs could be charmed and coaxed out of the water on to the bank, and that they have a language of their own? I have coaxed up a big bunch out of the moss by making the noise that means something good to eat; then give the signal that means danger, and see them all jump and dive. I guess I better quit before you think I'm lying.—CARLETON F. CRIPPEN.

Several years ago, on an island in the St. Lawrence, about June first I caught a small frog with my hands, held him a few minutes and noticed that he seemed not at all anxious to escape and even to like being gently stroked with the fingers. Getting tired of the game, I tossed him out into the water three or four feet from where I was sitting on my heels on the shore. He started to swim, turned and headed directly back to me. I held out my palm just below the surface of the water and he climbed back on it, stayed a few more moments and finally departed. It happens that I can produce two witnesses. Was it that he liked the warmth of the hand?

This Summer, hunting small frogs for bait, I found half a dozen or so in an old boxed-in spring. Caught one or two and the others

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went down under the floating moss, perhaps into the mud, the box bottom being broken. I waited; no frogs reappeared. Remembering Mr. Crippen's letter, I took a chance on frog talk. Heaven knows what I said, but I thought it at least sounded like a frog. Apparently they thought the same, for instantly three of them appeared at the surface and became bait. No witnesses. Maybe just coincidence. But next time I want frogs for bait I'll try it again.

I wrote Mr. Crippen my first experience—the second happened later—and finding I believed him, he wrote me a second letter, giving me more detailed data. I put that second letter aside for Camp-Fire and can't lay hands on it now, but it will appear sooner or later and I'll pass it on.

Laugh all you please, but some time make an experiment or two yourself and see what happens. Doubtless some of you have already done so. If so, be game and stand up with Mr. Crippen and me.

THAT *Adventure* and Camp-Fire draw many of us into personal acquaintanceships or friendships is an old story, but here is "Ask Adventure" doing the same thing among its scattered editors with our writers mixed in—Theodore S. Solomons, Thomas Samson Miller, Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton, E. E. Harriman. It's a personal and intimate letter, but breathing only good will and friendship and I'm hoping all concerned will not mind my passing it on to their other friends.

BERKELEY, CALIF.

I thought you'd like to know that we had a sort of "A. A." symposium here, just ended this morning.

I've been trying, occasionally, to see Milller, and he me, but we never made it, due somewhat to his migratory habits. Tried to find Harriman when in Los Angeles recently, but—no go. Also always wanted to see the Pinkertons, but never expected to—in the flesh. Likewise, have been struck with Brodeur's Scotch and Norse stuff and wondered what sort of chap, etc. Didn't know he lived on this coast, however.

THIS week have met the whole —— bunch! Isn't that queer? Harriman's booming voice hit me on the phone, first, a week ago. He was talking from the Pinkertons' house. They've been on the coast nine months and been living in Berkeley two. Called on me, but I and my family were on a vacation. All three called, and have seen them since several times. Miller this morning. (He too called while I was away. He's living in 'Frisco, across the bay, now.) Also, two nights ago took dinner with the Pinkertons and Brodeur and his wife and sister-in-law.

I've got a country place up near Yosemite Valley that I can't seem to arrange things to occupy (—— of a sentence, that) of late years, and I'm going to try to get the Pinkertons to live in it for a month or a year or ten years. They are awfully nervous in civilization—hankering for the Canadian pine woods; but I'm off with that Canada stuff for Americans except as a strict outing. For steady consumption the Sierras is more fit and becoming. So we are going to motor thither to-morrow. Pinkerton wants to work in the timber or herd sheep for awhile—says he's gone stale. Nicest people I've met in a coon's age, and we're thrashing out sled-craft problems, the spelling of "Parka" *vs.* "Parkey" (as to which *you* are still from Missouri) and various matters. Also I've been drawing out these "A. A." people on the subject of that peculiar—to say the least—department, getting their views, etc.—THEO. S. SOLOMONS.

WE OWE a debt of gratitude to Hugh Pendexter, not only for his stories of frontier life during the first making of America, but also for his very interesting Camp-Fire chats that make still clearer and more living the actual conditions and customs of those early days and show just how fully his stories follow actual history.

You will note now in this new serial of his, in order not to encroach upon W. C. Tuttle's fiction preserves, he has changed the real name of one of the characters instead of giving us a second *Magpie*. Incidentally these two members of our writers' brigade have become good friends by letter and at last reports were quarreling cheerily because one of them wanted to give the other a present and the other was refusing to accept it because he thought it too valuable. Which is about the only kind of quarrel that is warranted between friends.

WOOTON was born in Virginia, and lived there until seven years old, when his family moved to Kentucky. In 1836 he went to Independence, Mo., and joined a wagon-train owned by the Bents and Col. St. Vrain.

Wooton was better educated than his early companions, having had a good business education. He was nineteen when he went to the plains, and a dead shot. (He shot a mule while standing guard on the Upper Arkansas. A decade before him Carson did the same thing at Pawnee Rock.) Wooton was at Bent's Fort during 1836-37 and made frequent trips to Indian villages. During these two years he had many fights with the Pawnees, who hung about the fort after hair. In the same period he had many thrilling experiences with the Utes. In fact, his thirty years on the plains as trapper and trader were filled with adventures with various tribes.

In my story I've picked up his life at the close of the old order of things. He opened his toll-road in the Spring of 1866. Road-agents were extremely thick and very busy. Chuckle-luck and

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his running mate, Magpie, dined with him one morning and then hurried down the south slope of the Pass and held up the coach, much as I have *Chuckle-luck* and *Boy Charlie* do it. Because of W. C. Tuttle's immortal *Magpie* I didn't have the heart to use the name. And, once I invented *Boy Charlie*, I was further tempted to take liberties with Chuckle-luck's finish. As a fact Chuckle-luck and Magpie were shot in their sleep by one Seward, a member of their gang. He loaded the dead bandits into a cart, took them to Cimarron City and collected the one thousand dollars per.

Uncle Dick was perfectly safe at any time in any Arapaho village or camp, just as Jim Hobbs was a prime favorite with the Comanches. Uncle Dick's Arapaho name was Cut-Hand, as given in the yarn. He lived to be ninety years old. In Inman's "The Old Santa Fé Trail" it is stated that Wooton was blind for some time during the latter part of his life, and that a surgical operation restored his sight so that he could gaze once more on the magnificent scenery of the Raton Range. Col. Inman also says the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé Railroad named one of its freight locomotives (largest in the world then) "Uncle Dick" in honor of the old mountain man. Wooton and Carson were fast friends.

Little Raven, Yellow Bear, of the Arapahoes, and Satanta (Settainte), of the Kiowas, were real Injuns.

My story was suggested by the original name of the Purgatory, or rather by the story that explains the name. The Purgatory, Le Purgatoire, Picket-wire, as it was variously called, was El Rio de las Animas Perditas—The River of Lost Souls. During the time when Spain claimed practically all the Mississippi Valley and Florida, Santa Fé was ordered to open a road to Florida. A regiment of infantry set forth late in the season and passed the Winter on the site of Trinidad. The soldiers were accompanied by their women and children. In the Spring the camp-followers were ordered back to Santa Fé while the regiment marched down the river, which flows for miles through a cañon. Not a single soldier was ever seen or heard of again, says the story.

The duel between *Baptiste* and *Keene* was suggested by Jim Baker's duel with a rival French trader on Green River. They exchanged shots for several hours, retiring to their cabins between shots to drink. Thanks to the whisky, neither was injured. The fight between the Kiowas and Carson's New Mexico troops, and Satanta's playing the bugle, are correctly stated.

The tribal medicine of the Arapahoes consisted of the turtle, the ear of corn and the flat pipe, all of stone. The Kiowas had their *taime* images, the Cheyennes their sacred arrows, the Omahas their large shell, the Creeks their graven metal tablets (said to be relics of De Soto's visit). In fact, nearly every tribe (the Comanche being a notable exception) possessed tribal medicine.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

A WEAK memory for names is one of my strongest points and, even if I'm right as to the first name in this case, it doesn't follow that this comrade is the brother of Patrick and Terence Casey of our writer's brigade, the brother who was one of less than half a dozen survivors of the original Foreign Legion of the French army. I've never seen that Joe Casey, though I've talked with him over the phone and read about him in the papers. The intelligent thing would be to write to the writer of this letter and find out, but it will be more interesting to talk to him at Camp-Fire and then maybe Comrade Casey—or the two of them if there are two—will straighten matters out for all of us.

In any case we're obliged for the poem he sends in, a poem found in the trenches:

New York City.

SIR: The following lines were found in the hands of a young Irish officer, who lay dead in a trench on the Western front in France. An old-time reader of *Adventure*.—JOE CASEY.

Mother

Oh, mother, I am calling from the silence and the darkness,
And I wonder if you'll hear me in your home across the sea.
Oh, mother, darling mother, how I wish that you were near me,
With your arms around my shoulders. and my head upon your knee.

For I'm dying, mother darling, and it's hard to die without you;
So I'd like to hold your hand and hear your voice and see your eyes,
And feel myself a child again, and nestle close beside you,
And say the prayers you taught me to the One above the skies.

There'd be many things to whisper—it's so long since I have seen you;
And you'd gently draw me closer while I told about the fight.
Then, although your heart was breaking, you'd smile and say "My hero,"
And, when you thought me near the end, you'd kiss your boy good night.

Am I selfish, mother darling, to be wanting you so badly?
But there's no one like you, mother, you're just all the world to me.
And I'm not afraid of dying, but I'd face the Valley gladly,
If I knew that you could hear me in your home across the sea.

I must leave you, now, my darling, though I know that you'll be weeping,
But your boy has died for country, and the parting's for a day.
Till we meet again, then, mother, I leave you to His keeping,
And may His love enfold you, and His presence guard your way.

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LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

A REALLY good government is one that really looks after the people's interests, giving its attention to various matters in proportion to their importance to the people's interests, not merely dealing with certain matters established by unprogressive custom as its only business. Of course it is the people themselves who must determine what and how much their government is to look after. And of course such a government must be administered by statesmen, not politicians.

Our present government (not just this Administration alone) is administered for the most part by politicians, not statesmen; we the people haven't taken sufficient interest in determining just what it is to look after; our present government, therefore, is not a really good government. It is, fundamentally, the best kind of governmnet; the fault for its not having been well developed lies wholly with us the people.

STARTING with this point, there are some thousands of things that might be said. But let's consider just the one comparatively small question of flour.

One of the most important interests of a people is food, considered from both the economic and the physiological point of view. Food, therefore, is one of the first things a really good government should look after. Ours does, in a way. And yet, as war-time and post-war-time scarcities, profiteering and stupidities have proved to us, there seems a lot more it could and should do. Indeed, in the emergency, it has done more than formerly, demonstrating still more clearly the advantages of greater governmental supervision of the people's food supply.

Coming back to the one point of flour, for several years Alfred W. McCann in the New York *Globe* has conducted a strong and broad campaign for better food and better food distribution. I am not prepared to endorse all Mr. McCann's campaign for the simple reason that I have not followed it in detail, but I have been much interested in his work toward establishing the physiological and economic benefits to be derived from the use of whole-wheat flour as opposed to the fancy-milled white varieties. He has long made the point that the former is really the more nutritive and wholesome food, claiming that the other has had much of its most valuable nutriment milled out of it, the people paying extra for this extra milling and consequent loss of nutritive value.

At this writing the United States Grain Corporation seems to be backing his point, announcing that it has bought half a million barrels of pure wheat-flour to be sold to the public at prices around $1.50 per 24½ lb. package. This flour, says Mr. McCann, represents up to 80 per cent. of the wheat berry (while fancy patent flour represents only 71 per cent.), is "incomparably superior," and costs $4 less per barrel.

THAT is all. But, when you get to thinking it over, you find yourself asking all kinds of questions, among them some pretty big ones. For example, this government agency, product of war stress, seems to be thinking of the people's interests before those of the millers.

Again, just another stray example, it suggests the advantage of having a thing controlled or supervised by those who are experts in that thing, instead of by mere politicians who know nothing about it or by private citizens whose personal interests in that thing are likely to blind them to the people's interests in that thing.

AND this, in turn, brings up the whole question of Civil Service Reform—that is, it does if you happen to know just what huge strides the Civil Service Reform movement has made in its abiltiy to inject efficiency and cleanness into government if given the chance. If you don't know, drop a line to the National Civil Service Reform League, 8 West 40th Street, New York City, and undergo a little shock of surprise when you learn, not their "theories," but what they have *proved by practical test* can be done. If Civil Service needs any other recommendation, just remember that the Party System doesn't like them at all.

A wandering discourse, this. But if its stray points set you thinking as hard as they do me, it won't matter how wandering this disclosure is.

—A. S. H.

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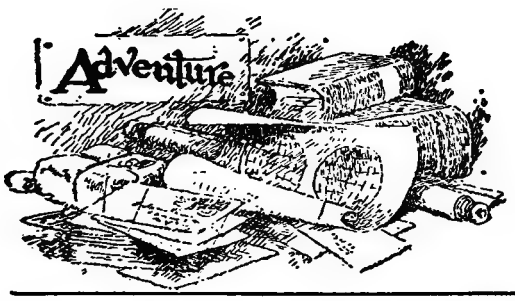

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: Oct., 1913, to Mid-Nov., 1919, inclusive. All in good condition. Make offer to JOHN H. MACKEY, 31 E. Ashley St., Jacksonville, Fla.

WILL SELL: First Sept., 1918, and Mid-June to First Aug., 1919, inclusive. All in good condition. Price fifty cents not including postage.—Address CHRISTOPHER GORDON ENNIS, 344 Willow St., Waterbury, Conn.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 77—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received to-day is too late for the current issue, allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina. Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, P. O. Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, 714 Crilly B'ld'g., Chicago, Ill. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1
J. B. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs; topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

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Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 3
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 4
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 7
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

20. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

21. South America Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

22. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

23. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports, hunting, trading, traveling.

24. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, Box 807A.—R. F. D. No. 10, Los Angeles, California. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports; manufacturing.

25. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

26. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

27. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria, Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

28. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

29. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

30. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N.W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, 7 Place de Tertre, Paris, XVIII, France. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

31. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

32. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash. D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

FOR ARMY, NAVY OR MARINE CORPS

Accurate, free information. What the Government is doing for discharged soldiers and sailors. Facts not opinions given. No questions answered involving criticism or bestowing praise or blame. Enclose stamped addressed envelope. Address—SERVICE, THE HOME SECTOR, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, New York.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Major A. M. Lochwitzky.

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The Great Southwest

NO small part of these United States is the Southwest, and the books that tell about it take up considerable space on shelf. But the country is as interesting as it is big, and the books are almost as interesting as the country. We recommend that you try some of those on Mr. Harriman's list when you've finished with the information he gives:

Question:—"Please give me some information about Utah, Nevada, Arizona and California. Are these States very thickly settled? Tell me something about the cattle ranches and about how the work is done on them in that part of the West.

What kind of work is most important in these states? Are there many Indians and how do most of them live? Is there plenty of game? What kind?

I would like to know something about the mountains and plains and about travel over them. Is the country very wild? How about camps, cabins, fish and fur? I am most interested in mountains, plains and cattle ranches."—B. M. B.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Now look here, son: right off the handle I am going to give you a little list of writers whose books you should read. They will tell you a host of things you will be glad to know.

If you can reach a public library or can get a membership in some circulating library of any repute, you start in and read these:

The books of Stewart Edward White, John Muir, W. T. Hornaday, Teddy Roosevelt, John Burroughs, Clarence King, any first-class writer's tale of General Fremont. Get hold of Mary Austin's "Land of Little Rain." Read Mark Twain's "Roughing It," to get the old-day angle.

By the time you have absorbed these you will have a good many more ideas than you ever had before. Now to answering your questions.

You ask for general information, not specific, and that you will get.

California is thickly settled in all but the mountainous parts. The mountains of the State are well peppered with small ranches of all sorts, but mostly apple, cherry and cattle-raising kinds. There are found the bulk of the mines and all the lumber camps. The State has about three million inhabitants, of which 832,000 are in Los Angeles County. Oregon you don't mention, but it is thickly populated west of the mountain range called the Cascades, scatteringly east of there.

Nevada has a small population, being largely barren country—only about 80,000 in the State. Utah is more largely fitted for farming and has more people, though it has much desert land. Arizona has the biggest number of these three partly desert states and raises more cattle, sheep and farm produce than both Utah and Nevada. It has the highest general mineralization of any state in the country. It has a wide variety of minerals and produces tremendous annual values.

The cattle ranches have dropped the old long-horn variety of cow and raise Herefords instead. There are some ranches where they keep Polled Angus and Angus-Aberdeen cattle that are almost as thick as they are long. Others raise Shorthorn Durhams, but Herefords seem to be the favorites. Barbed-wire takes the place of many hundreds of punchers. The cowman of today does a lot of riding, but his duties are far more general than they were in the old days.

A puncher of today builds and repairs fences, cuts and stacks hay, doctors sick cattle, examines stock in search of disease, such as the foot and mouth disease. He examines calves to see if the screwworm is getting in his deadly work and treats them for that pest. He has to skin dead stock, kill predatory animals such as wolves, coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions and any bear that has begun killing stock.

He is just as apt to run a Ford as he is to ride a bucking bronc.

You ask what kind of work is most important in these States. Well, it varies with the State. In Nevada—mining. In Utah—farming. In Arizona — farming — cattle ranching and mining. In California — mining — oil-wells — cattle-raising sheep- and Angora goat-raising—fruit-raising—sugar beets — lumbering — cotton-raising — shipping vegetables—ocean commerce and packing-house industries that run from hogs to every kind of fruit and vegetables. Arizona is starting with cotton, too.

Plenty of Indians in all four States. They live in all sorts of ways. Some just as they did a hundred years ago, but mostly in some sort as the white men do. There are squaws in every tribe in this State who use sewing-machines, etc.

I don't know just what you want or expect me to tell about our mountains and plains. Take some atlas or geography and look at the map of California. Pick out this county, Los Angeles. All that part that lies next the ocean is plain, with small mountains or high hills in short ranges crisscrossing it. It is the richest farming land I know. Cross the Sierra Madre Mountains and you find the eastern half a great valley called Antelope Valley, semi-desert now, wholly desert at first. Irrigation water is bringing it back to rich productiveness.

San Bernardino County—the corner touching L. A. is productive, the rest all desert, mostly rich in minerals. Riverside County below it—half made productive by water development—the rest still desert. San Diego two-thirds productive—the rest desert. Imperial—in 1900 all desert and not a white man there—today producing over thirty million dollars' worth a year in farm produce, stock, cotton, etc.

North from here—Ventura—greatest bean-raising county in the U. S. Santa Barbara—cattle—farming—beautiful scenery. San Luis Obispo—fruit and farm produce. Kern County—rich in oil—many fine farms—mostly flat plains with a few bare, brown mountains running across it. Inyo—desert — mountains — minerals. Tulare — flat farm country. Fresno—a hot place in Summer—great stock-raising county—flat in west—mountains in east. Beyond these you strike mountain country all the way north, with big valleys and little valleys in between that are farmed to the last acre. The mountains get more and more covered with forests as you go on. The group of little counties—Merced—Mariposa—Tuolumne—Stanislaus — Calaveras—Amador — Placer — Nevada — Sierra — Yuba—Butte—Plumas—all of the great gold belt that gave up so much wealth.

From here north the immense forests of pine—

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fir—cedar—redwood, are all over the ranges. Many thousands of acres of ranchland cultivated in the valleys. Mountains running up to 14,350 feet. Trout in every stream. Deer plentiful. Bear running all about. Mountain lions, lynx, bobcats, wolves, coons, rabbits, squirrels. Go west to the streams that run into the ocean and find salmon by the million in their season.

Yes, you bet they are fine counties up there. No end of good fun. I start for there May 15th and I didn't come back till I got good and ready, by heck.

As for travel over the mountains—I make a trip every now and then to one or the other of several camps down here, located at elevations running from 4,000 to 5,500 feet, by auto, and one can go to a number on the Rim of the World at 7,000 to 7,400 feet by auto on a paved road. In the north they lack the paved roads, but there are a number of mountain camps that can be reached by auto trips.

Petroleum in Peru

NOT only in Texas does the oil flow freely. Peru and Bolivia have their wells and are developing the industry rapidly. Edgar Young tells what opportunities an oil-worker has down there:

Question:—"As I am acquainted with the oil industry in California and Mexico, I would like if you would give me some information in regard to oil in Bolivia and Peru.

Are these new fields started? If so, how deep is the oil or gas found? Do they use standard tools or rotary drillers?

Is it desert country? How far from the coast? Is it on the railroad? How are the highways or other modes of travel to and from the fields? Who are the principal operators doing business? What is the fare from San Franciso?

What are the standard wages for rotary drillers, derrick-men, pumpers and mechanics needed in the oil fields?

Is there any "Baedeker" out for Peru or Bolivia? If so, please give me name and address of same and I will send for it."—JOE HEROTZ, Taft, California.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—The best known petroleum deposits of Peru, now being worked, are:

In North Peru in the three districts of Tumbes, Pira, and Lambayeque, on or near the coast. Wells of depths of less than 300 feet have proved good producers and many of them have been bored out into the water similar to the Santa Barbara fields in California.

Back in the ravines oil has been struck in the first layer of oil sand at depths of from 800 to 1,000 feet. Another layer of oil sand has been struck below this at depths of from 2,400 to 2,600 feet.

The principal operations in North Peru are as follows:

Province of Tumbes, "Zorritos," owned by F. G. Piaggio and Co., Callao, Peru.

Province of Paita, "Lobitos," owned by Lobitos Oilfields, Ltd.; their agents are Milne and Cia, Lima, Peru.

Province of Paita, "Negritos" and "La Breat Parinas," owned by London and Pacific Petroleum Co., Ltd.; leased to Lagunlots Oil Co., Ltd., Province of Puira, "Bayovar," owned by Bayovar Oil Dev. Co., Ltd., V. F. Marsters, England, and G. M. Paita, Peru.

There are refineries at Zorgritos, Lobitos and Talara. A. T. Snyder is General Manager of the Lagunito Oil Co., Ltd., at Talara, Peru. The London and Pacific Petroleum Co., Ltd., are agents for the Union Oil Co., of San Francisco. The Union Oil Co. is well posted on Peruvian oil developments if they care to tell you.

In South Peru about 300 miles from the coast near Lake Titicaca, the Titicaca Oil Co., a good quality of oil has been found in this high altitude (12,000 feet) and it is claimed that traces have been found connecting this field up with the field in the north.

The Titicaca Oil Co. has had trouble for many years with the railroad (Peruvian Corp.) in regard to transporation and other features, and the last time I was there they were at loggerheads. I have heard indirectly that this trouble was settled in 1916 and that operations were going on and that the oil would be sold in Bolivia to the railroads and shipped into eastern South America by a new railroad line that was nearing completion.

I am unable to state exact conditions in South Peru in the oil line due to the fact that the censorship cut off my supply of information as a war measure.

In Bolivia, in the year 1916, relatively pure oil and pitch had been found in shallow pools along the foot-hills of the Cordillera Real from the Department of Santa Cruz to the village of Monte Agudo, a distance of 300 miles in a narrow belt.

There were also indications of oil in the Beni district. However, if any producing wells exist there now they have been drilled since 1916, so far as I know. In South Peru wells had been sunk at Corapata, Nayca, Yauli, Huancavelica and Punta Restin.

Methods: Walking beam, bit, and rope (standard), rotary, and the same English methods near Tampico, Mexico. Pay was running from $150 to $250 and free quarters in various lines. Quite a number of Californians are down there. Some of the operations are right on the coast, others lying twenty-five miles back.

Ports: Paita and Tumbes, reached on Callao boat from Balboa (Panama). Fare was $140 from Frisco via Pacific Mail and Peruvian S.S. Co. last time I made it. I think it is around $165 now. The Pacific Mail will sell you a through ticket with connection at Balboa. South Peru and Bolivia will be more. It is quite a railroad trip up from the coast at Mollendo or Antofogasta.

Write the Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., for free information covering this subject and also price list of their publications. Also write Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Latin-American Division, Washington, D. C. This latter source is well posted on this industry, I believe. Also write *The South American Magazine*, 310 Lexington Avenue, New York City, N. Y., for data and list of books sold by them.

I am unable to locate a Baedeker of Peru. Would advise you to write Brentano's, 5th Ave., and 27th Street, New York City. This would not help you much, for the oil game is fairly new and has jumped from a production of 40,000 barrels per year to nearly 3,000,000 in the past few years, which makes it next to Mexico in oil production in Latin America.

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Revolvers of Long Ago

WHAT follows goes far toward answering the much argued question: "When were the first revolvers used?" Also, gives the straight truth about fanning a Colt single action:

Question:—"Now that I am seated in a comfortable spot on the up-wind side of the fire, will you kindly inform me about what date the first revolver, shooting cartridges, was used.

I was of the opinion that the prevailing style, at least, of one-hand ordnance, in the fifties, was the old cap-and-ball six-gun.

But while spread out in front of the grate last evening, enjoying *Adventure*, I found that Gordon Young, in "The Mask of the Iron Face," has one of his characters, in a mining camp in the early fifties, pick up a belt of cartridges and a revolver.

Now he may be right. Far be it from me to dispute the point, but I would be obliged for some information on the subject.

Also, I always read of the hero twirling a six-gun and fanning it at the same time, making dead-center shots every time, with a wee bit of a doubt. Now I learned long ago never to say a thing couldn't be done, but I would sure like to be shown.

As for myself, I have just about given up hope of ever being anything but an ordinary pistol shot. With careful sighting I can get the seven shots from an army automatic in a ten-inch bull, and fifty per cent. in a man's size silhouette, snap-shooting at twenty yards; but never seem to get any better.

I am something of a nut on pistols and have quite a number of different patterns. A few days ago I picked up an old Franch dueling pistol, flint-lock, in a junk store here in this old French town. It looks like it might have been carried by General Joshua in his Jericho campaign.

I greatly enjoy every copy I can get of *Adventure*. Have never had anything especially interesting happen to me, except that I have been pounded, and drowned, shot and stabbed, bombed, gassed and married, all the way from the Philippines to Alaska, Mexico, South America, the West Indies and France."—CAPT. HERBERT R. SMITH, Angers, France.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—You asked in regard to the earliest cartridge revolvers. I am unable to find just when the first cartridges were used in the one-hand arms, but from what I am able to ascertain, I think that the few Smith and Wessons that were made under the Ponds patents, granted April 3, 1855, were the first of the cartridge revolvers, just as the old Volcanic repeating pistol was the first repeater, as we know it.

The Ponds patent was made for the metallic, rim-fire shells, such as we see today, but the Volcanic pistol, mechanically similar to the Henry rifle, used a peculiar cartridge, the bullet being hollow-based and containing the powder charge and the percussion cap, the whole works going out the barrel at the discharge, leaving nothing to extract. The Volcanics were patented February 14, 1854.

I think the probabilities of the Forty-niners using a pistol that was adapted to cartridges is rather unlikely, although the old skin cartridges, resembling a section of wienerwurst, were in use during the Civil War. They were carried in pouches on the belt, so that this might by a stretching of the imagination be termed a cartridge belt—but not the looped belt, on which we pack our six-guns today.

Now—for that fanning and twirling stunt that the magazines heroes perform so carelessly: I can twirl and snap the hammer of the old Colt single-action army revolver, as can any other man who will take a little time to practise the art, but I can't hit anything that way, and neither can any other truthful man. It just "ain't did," that's all. But I can take a double-action revolver, and, whirling it with my index finger in the trigger guard, as demonstrated by Gus Peret, make a fairly good target at short range. But I don't cock the gun—just use the self-cocking feature.

I have always wondered where some of the more popular writers got their gun knowledge after reading some of the feats performed by the handsome hero, when his foes "gang up" on him.

I have had a good many letters from men who have used the automatic where a hand weapon was intended to be used, viz., in a close corner; not one seemed to favor the self-loader. The old revolver seems to be the tool they would prefer. The automatic is all right while clean, but when it gets dirty!

I think your shooting with the automatic is about up to what I have seen done with this type of arm.

You are to be congratulated upon your collection and the opportunity you have of adding to it.

Chances in New Zealand

THERE is always room in New Zealand for a man with the right stuff in him. And in return for what such a man may bring, these great islands have plenty to offer:

Question:—"I would like information on the following subjects:

What is the climate of New Zeland? Do you have snow?

What is the chance for work? I am a paper-maker by trade. I am also familiar with railroad work. What is the rate of wages paid to common laborers?

What is the average price of land per acre? Has the government any land for sale?

What does it raise for crops?

What is there for fraternal and secret orders and societies?

What is the average cost of meals and lodging for a man per week?

How far is Australia from New Zealand? When was New Zealand first settled? When was it discovered?

Is there any shortage of labor on account of the world war?

I have just been discharged from the service and would like to see more of the world."—GUY L. PUTNEY, Bristol, N. H.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—The climate of New Zealand is of that classification known as temperate. Snow is a curiosity in the North Island—excepting of course, that we see it on the mountains—and even in the South Island press telegrams are sent out whenever there is a fall of snow. There are two modest paper-making mills in New Zealand—one

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at Dunedin, in the far south, and the other in Auckland, at the other extreme of the Dominion. There is a good deal of railway work over here, because this is a young country, just being opened up to settlement.

The railroads in New Zealand are all owned and run by the state and the policy is directed by a Minister of Railways, who just now is the Prime Minister, Mr. Massey. Common laborers, pick-and-shovel men, and practically all unskilled labor gets from $2.50 to $3 per day of eight hours. It would be difficult to average the price of land. In the country district immediately outside the town I am living in, dairying and agricultural land is bringing up to $600 per acre. Land is considered very cheap—and cheap as dirt at that—which brings from $100 to $300 per in a dairying district—and one of our chief exports is the product of the cow. We export much butter, cheese, casein and dried milk.

Grazing land for cattle and sheep—which we also export largely—is also very dear. To get land at a reasonable rate settlers have to go into the back country and carve a home and a farm out of the heavy bush. That virgin land on which the bush is burned off is obtainable at from about $30 to $100 per, minus roads and rails. But there is a far greater demand than supply for land, the returned soldiers waiting their turn for sections.

New Zealand grows wheat, oats, barley, potatoes and grass-seed; and the Maoris—our aborigines—are specialists in growing maize. Freemasonry is very popular, with lodges in city, town and village throughout the land. We have both the Manchester Unity and the American orders of Odd Fellows, and besides there are Foresters, Hibernian, Rechabite, Orange, Temperance, and other orders. We used to have Knights of Labor, but that is dead.

The average weekly board and lodging rate for a working-class man is $5 to $6—that's for three meals per day and bed, washing extra. Meals only would be twenty-four cents to forty-eight cents, with tea, but no liquor. Australia is four days' steam from New Zealand, or 1,200 miles.

The serious and organized settlement of New Zealand may be said to have begun in 1840. The discovery of New Zealand has been ascribed to several of the early European navigators—to de Conneville in 1504, to Fernandez, and to Tasman in 1642, and the latter has the best claim. But Captain Cook is the real discoverer of this Greater Britain of the South, in 1769.

There is always room here for a man who can turn his hand to anything and can move around from one job and another until he finds the place of settlement. Shortage of labor is a fluctuating thing and term, and, as there are only a few over one million inhabitants in New Zealand and she can accomdate ten million easily, you can guess our position. Glad to answer a man who knows what he wants to know, and am all the more ready to give prompt attention to one who has done his bit at the war in helping to break the shackles of Prussianism, which threatened New Zealand just as seriously as it did the United States. *Kia Oral*—which is Maori for Good Luck!

Florida Stock-Raising

MANY think cattle raising the best growing industry in the State. Therefore it merits careful consideration if you intend to make Florida your home. And many of you do, judging from the number of inquiries Mr. Liebe has had concerning the chances for settling in the land of the royal palm:

Question:—"I should like some information about stock-raising in Florida.

What counties are best suited for it? Can good grazing land be leased, and at how much per acre?

How much land and capital would a new settler need? Which stock would be more profitable for a man with small means—cattle, sheep or hogs?"
—GEO. C. REED, West Pittston, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—Below you will find your questions answered in the order in which you asked them:

In my judgment, everything considered, the central part of Florida would be the best part for stock-raising. There is some land along the A. C. L. Railway between Orlando and Kissimmee that looks fine for this. Also between Kissimmee and Tampa, along the same railroad, there is much land that would make good grazing. I understand that good grazing land may be found in the Everglades country, too. The latter-named would, of course, be much cheaper than land in central Florida.

I should say that grazing land could be leased easily enough. Can't say as to the price. Some would charge you more than others, naturally.

"How much land and cattle would a settler need?" All you can get, I guess. I regard the cattle industry as the best growing industry in the State, and I would rather put money in it than in orange groves.

For a man with small means, I think hogs would be better than cattle. Plant different crops, in rotation; as fast as the hogs get the best of one field, turn them into another, you know. Good hog-crops are rape, peanuts, chufas, velvet beans, etc. But hogs should finish their fattening on corn, in order to harden the meat.

Take my advice, and don't leap before you've looked everything over very carefully. A lot of people lose their heads entirely the moment they see Florida; it's more or less intoxicating. And remember, there are land sharks here just as there are anywhere else.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

HUGH. Please write your pal a line.—Address ALBERT J. ARBUCKLE, Private, Headquarters Co., Camp Benning, Ga.

ALBERT, VIVIAN. Last heard of in 1900 at Bay City, Mich. Any one having any information please write. —Address ALVERDO S. ALBERT, Ione, Wash.

DORKS, MISS BARBARA, Relative. Last heard from in Cleveland, Ohio. Oct. 14, 1918. Any information appreciated.—Address A. M. BARLOW, Box 51, Wichita Falls, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

FIELDER, EDWARD OR "BANDY." Last heard of in 1902 at St. Louis, Mo. Any information will be appreciated by his nephew.—Address RAYMOND COFFIN, Troop K, Thirteenth Cavalry, Fort Clark, Texas.

MOSS, CORP. BRUCE D. Last heard of with Eighth Infantry, at Camp Fremont, Calif. Write your buddie of the P. I. days. Shanty has something that will interest you.—Address FRANK M. BAFF, Woodruff, Utah.

LEEMAN, CORP. GEORGE W. Last heard of with Eighth Infantry, at Camp Fremont, Calif. Write your buddie of the P. I. days. Shanty has something that will interest you.—Address FRANK M. BAFF, Woodruff, Utah.

THOM, GUSTAVE. Last seen in Omaha, Nebr., in 1905. Age about sixty, six feet in height. Any information will be appreciated by his son.—Address JOHN E. THOM, 251 Payne Ave., North Tonawanda, N. Y.

PENTACOFF, SGT. CHARLES W. Please write home. Mother and father very worried. I went on reserve August 5th. All is well at home—Address LLOYD PENTACOFF, 65 Douglas Ave., Freeport, Ill.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the First February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

PRESCOTT, GEORGE. Last seen in New York City, January, 1909. Was with Boer War Exhibition Co., St. Louis, Mo., in 1904 during World's Fair. Was principal rider in DeWet's escape, doing the water plunge. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JAMES DEARING, 78th F. A., Camp Grant, Ill.

DIXON, ROBERT L. Of Columbia, South Carolina. Last heard of in May, 1915. Then serving in the 117th Co., C. A. C., Fort Adams, Newport, R. I. Age twenty-seven, height five feet eight inches, weight 135 pounds. Any information will be appreciated.—Address, CHARLIE WILDER, First-class private, A Co., 3rd U. S. Engineers, Manila, P. I.

HALL, CHARLES FREDERICK. Last heard of in Detroit, Mich., in 1914. Was at that time working in a garage there, but was about to change his work and go into the ice business. Black hair, brown eyes, weighed about 165 pounds, five feet five inches in height. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. E. ONION, 7 Benton St., Stoneham, Mass.

MCCLARTY, JAMES, Seaman. Last heard of in St. Johns, Newfoundland, 1878-1879. Shipped for Cape Horn and African ports. Brother of wife of James Collis, a shipchandler at St. Johns. Communicate with relatives. —Address Box 7, Albany, N. Y.

SAGEL, OLLIE E. Of Logan, Ohio. Last heard of in November, 1914. Then serving in the 117th Co., C. A. C., at Fort Adams, Newport, R. I. Age twenty-four, height five feet four inches, weight 125 pounds, black hair, blue eyes, dark complexion. Any information will be appreciated.—Address CHARLIE WILDER, First-class private, A Co., 3rd U. S. Engineers, Manila, P. I.

BARBER, PEARL. Of Macon, Georgia. Last heard of in July, 1918, living at Climax, Georgia. Age twenty-two years, long black hair, brown eyes, dark complexion, weight about 125 pounds, height about five feet four inches. Any information will be appreciated by her cousin.—Address CHARLIE WILDER, First-class private, A Co., 3rd U. S. Engineers, Manila, P. I.

REESER, ALBERT, E. Of Williamsport, Penn. Last heard of in July, 1915. Then serving in the 78th Co., C. A. C. at Fort Moultrie, South Carolina. Age twenty-three, height five feet six inches, weight 130 pounds, black hair, black eyes, fair complexion. Any information will be appreciated.—Address CHARLIE WILDER, First-class private, A Co., 3rd U. S. Engineers, Manila, P. I.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First January or Mid-January issues of Adventure. They can get name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ATKINS, W. F. L.; Ayton, Tom; Baker, M. Lena; Beavers, Frank E.; Belcher, Ralph Brooke; James, Henry; Brown, R. H.; Brown, W. R.; Campbell, James W.; Cansler, Clyde; Conde, James Bache; Connor, Maggie; Elliott, Richard Lillicoe; Hall, Leslie A.; Hart, Harry Lee; Hartwig, George H.; Howe, Roger Willoughby; Innes, Richard and James, J. A. B. or B. R. T.; Kesser, Jacob; Kemp, John Crawley; Knowles, Edward; Louden, Hall; Mattos, or Murray, Frank J.; Parke, Hicok; Phillips, Warren J.; Pollard, Charles; Robinson, Ian; Saxon, Walter Percy; Schafhausen, Leo J.; Skene, James Percy; Smith, Charles E.; Smith, Paul J.; Smith, William; Streetzel, Fred; Wallace, Roland Martin; Wangenstein, Fred, Jr.; Wende, Bernhardt N.; Whitters, Joseph H.; Williams, "Montana" or Walter; Baker Walker G.; Wilson, William H. C.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Bryon Chrisholm; Wm. S. Hilles; A. B. Paradis; G. E. Hungerford; James P. Goggins; E. E. S. Atkins; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson, E. Murphy.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALLISON, CORP. JAMES T.; Beaton, G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bryson, Clarence F., Mr. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S., Carr, Fred; Coles, Bobby; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Engleby, B.; Garson, Ed.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter, J.; Hart, Jack;

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Hines, Joseph; Kelly, Charles Lester; Kostzav, John; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry; Lee, Dr. William R.; Leighton, Capt.; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; MacNamee, Alva I.; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Parrott, D. C.; Reid, Raymond D.; Rich, Bob; Rundle, Merrill G.; Scott, James F.; Swan, George F.; Taylor, Jim; Thomas, C. L.; Tripp, Edward; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Wetherell, Corp. D. E.; Williams, Raymond J.; Williams, W. P.; Wood, Basil D.; S 177284; 439; L. T. 348; J. C. H.; W. S. X. V.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address E. F. BRACE, care *Adventure*.

THE following names have been inquired for within the past two years. The name of the inquirer can be obtained from this magazine:

ALRAREZ, M. H.; Anderson, Charles Michell; Anderson, Nelson Miles; Anderson, Alex.; Arbuckle, Margaret; Amarante, Francisco de Paula; Anderson, William Hamilton; Anderson, John Emil; Acken, B. C.; Adams, "Jeff"; Albritton, Tom and Jessie B.; Adams, two aunts and uncle; Allan, Hughie V.; Alchunas, Alex; Anderson, Carl or Charles; Ambrose, Chris, Berry, Nellie; Bergsbrom, Albin; Berman, Herman A.; Austell, Percy W.; Atkins, Warren; Atkins, Walter J.; Ayles, Leon W. and Tessie; Baker, R. W.; Burns, Ada; Butler, Jack Ormonde; Bates, A. L.; Barringer, Mrs. Lavina May; Bareda, St. Revato; Bastla, Clifford S.; Bargery, William; Barker, Horace; Bartlett, Geo. H.; Baughman, Guy; Beck, Mrs. Bessie; Bell, John Watson; Beasley, Tom H.; Beaton, Sergt.-Major Gordon M.; Belknap, Earl; Beaubier, Jerry E.; Beyrsdotler, A.; Bjerkander, Henry; Bird, Rhodora; Blitz, or Bliss, Joe; Brechele, Harry, Bowman, Clarence L.; Bohinz, Jack; Boulton, George W.; Bruffey, Elmer; Bradt, Charles Edwin; Branock, Ray; Branscombe, Earl; Brigman, B. F.; Brandel, Jack; Brockman, C. A.; Brown, Berry; Brown, Clayton; Brown, Grace Florence; Burns, Wm.; Butts, Chester H.; Burkett, Sgt.-Major; Bunker, Earl R.; Byars, Alexander Terry; Breese, Lieut. Sidney V. C.; Campbell, Kennard; Carroll, James W.; Carmichael, Archibald; Castle, Edward Moses; Caxter, Charles B.; Carlson, Nels; Colab, Susanna; Case, Lewis; Challa, Theodore Menage; Clarke, Harry; Cherrington, Don K.; Chamberlain, Carl D.; Cilch; Chanthes, Memer de; Chipman; Chafin, W. R. and Roderic Morrough; Chase, S.; Classant, Henri de; Clarke, James; Clochesy, William; Clayton, George; Clifton, Mrs. Harry; Clancy, R. L.; Clayton, Frank, Cole, Lubin Merton; Coe, C. A.; Coate, Tom, Coates, Frank; Collins, Michael James; Coolidge, Frank Townley; Cooper, Ted; Costello, Jack; Couth, Mrs. Mary; Copp, Ed.; Cox, Sherman W. or Austin A.; Cosses, M. Angle; Coonerty, M. C.; Conant, Herman; Conant, Jennie B.; Conant, Harold Beecher, Conant William Heywood; Cooke, Harry Malcom; Conners, Will F. W.; Conkle, Clarence; Cranston, Arthur W.; Cross, Horace Keith; Curtiss, Marion; Crouse, Samuel Blake; Cunningham, James, Maggie, Mary and John; Curran, Hugh; Crossey, Wm.; Cuthbert, Clarence; Daniel, John B.; Dankel, Henry; Dattle, Arthur, Dalton, George; De Lapp, Will E.; Diggs, John W.; Dickerson, Tommie; Dietz, Mrs. Will; Dickinson, C. L.; Dickey, Hulbert; Divers, John Sterling; Douglas, James R.; Dove, Emery; Drummond, J. A.; Donald, William James and John Henry; Dorians, Mildred; Dominick, Mac; Doyle, Michael; Doyle; Driscoll, John Joseph; Dupree, Alex, Dunkerley, Fred.; Ducette, Hector; Duncan, George R., Duncan, Flossie; Duringer, Allan A.; Duncan, Ed and Ellis; Edwards, John H.; Edwards, Samuel; Ellis, Lloyd W.; Elliott, Robert; Egan, D. Jack; Earle, William F.; Earl, John Ernest; Echols, Lon; Devers, L. W.; Dempsey, Raymond S.; Devine, Dan; Dewal, Jack E., Jr.; Decker, Edward L.; Denniston, Thos. Greer; Evans, Wille.

FAIRCHILD, JOHN; Fioch, Forrest Thurman; Farley, "Rush"; Fisher. Elmer; Fisher "Bud"; Fisher, Fred L.; Flint, Harry; Fisher, William Wright; Fillingham, Fred L.; Filbert, Fred; Fletcher, R. A.; Flagg, Melvin L.; Flattery, Michael A.; Foose, James O.; Foster, Tom; Foster, Dixon or Bert; Foley, Peter; Fred (Brother); Fribert, Fred; Fuller, Walter William; Gainty, John; Gambrall, Theodore Chas.; Gates, Walter C.; Gallaway, Karl H.; Gale, David J.; Gaskill, L. B.; Gende, Eugenio; Gilday, John E.; Gilmore, Edw. E.; Gillett, Frank M., Glauman, Al; Gibbs, Richard H.; Geho, Pvt. David W.; Glauman, Al., Goodacre, Leon; Goodwill, Clifton C.; Golden, Jimmie; Gordon, Mrs. Aaron; Granville, Richard, Griffin, Tom, Gross, Louis, Gross, Marles; Griffith, Charlie E., Guttroff, Herman Martin; Hall, J. Harold; Hackett, Clyde O.; Hainze, Eugene; Haley, Robt. E. Lee; Hammack, B. H.; Halloran, Tom; Hall, Will G. E.; Hargett, Fred L.; Harmon, H. E.; Hart, Albion W.; Harper, Lafayette; Harris, Geo.; Harrison, William; Harris, Fred, Hannold, Henry F.; Hart, Jack; Hayne, Emil, Haydon, Dewey; Hayes, Arthur Joseph; Hellman, Wm.; Henderson, Al.; Henderson, Mrs. Edith Houston; Herrod, William; Hendricks, E. Sylvester; Heywood, Walter; Hewke, Manda; Hicky; Hilliard, Leon; Hilgenhorst, John; High, Charlie or Aubrey Godfrey; Hogan, John, Hoffman, Frank L.; Holl, Robert; Hofiner Mr. and Mrs. Frederick; Holmes, Norman L.; Hottenstein George Edward, Hopkins, Horace; Honifer, Gus; Houdyshelt, Jasper E.; Houghton, Frank Wentworth; Hourahan John C.; Hook, Mrs. Mary; Hoskins, Frank; Holder, Charles Henry, Howard, R. L.; Hutton, William K., Hyer, Joe; Hugill, Ashton C. and Hugo Van Alstyn; Hughes, Wm. P.; Hunt, Charles; Inge, Jim; Irving, H.; Izat, John; Jackson, Charles; Jenks, Frank E.; Jeffries, Charles D.; Johnson, Harry C.; Johnson, Sam H.; Jones, R. C., Johnson, J. H.; Johnson, J. C.; Judson, Robert A.; Johnson, A. L. or L. A., Joynt, Harry, Jones, Drumm Charles O.; Karoko, Peter; Kade, Ray T.; Kelly, Thomas Francis; Kelly, R. E.; Keene, Carl Howard; Kelly, Sergeant, M.; Key, Thos. W.; Kelly, Robert E.; Kenner, Alfred W.; Kelley Wynnie; Kelly, Robert E.; King, William Benedell; King, C. E.; King, Sergt. F. W.; King, Frank M.; King, Jim; King, Vance Harold; Kirby, Willie Holbert; Kirk, Howard; Kleinle, Erving Louis; Kline, Sergt. Onie F.; Knotte, Maxmillan Louis; Kluger, Irving; Kratz, Herman A.; Krause, Charles; Kohn. Pvt. Wm.; Kuffer, or Keiffer; Kuller, Harry; Landells, Gavin or Guy; Langford, George Washington, Larsen, Lawrence; Lacy, James E.; LaBrache, P.; Laski, Charles or Alexander; Laing, Harry; L. S. F.; Law, Francis Gordon; Lee, Leeland and Bennett; Ledingham or Ward, John; Lee, Delbert C.; Lessnaw, Joe; Lewis, Clayton J.; Lenning, Harry Gollander; Lentz, Geo. Theo.; Lindholm, Victor A.; Lindergren, Estell and Ernest; Loftis, Edward Marshall; Lough, Lyle, Loveday, Fr.; Love, Robt.; Love, Mrs. Marie, Violet and Daisy; Lorntzen, Chris, Lewis, Beny, Lindrot, Alexander; Lockwood, Charles N.; Lynch, Miss Barbara; Lucas, Jo.; Lynch, Miss Barbara; Lyon, Henry, Luntze, Alfred; Lucas, Mrs. Jo; Lucas, Jo; McAlvery, Maggie and Wilham and John; McCord, John; McCorry, Guy, Lawrence and Guerdon; Miller, Wm. Gustaf; Millenchuer, Percy C.; Mirovoye, John; Michael, James; McInnes, Frank J.; McKay, Florence; McKenna; McCormack, L., McGovern, John; McColl, John B.; McDonald, James, McGrath, Pvt. Thos Edward; McFadden, Paul; McNaulty, Francis; McNellis, William; McMurry, Mrs.; McMahon, Michael; MacConnell, Talbert; Major, A. S.; MacDougall, Dougall; Magnus, Alf.; McGown, Mackie; Manley, Clifford E.; Malone, Dan C.; Maguire, George, MacCracken, John Alcorn; Magill, Robert, Mac, Marrone, Vito.; Martin, Abraham; Marshall, Bert W.; Martin, Walter; Marchmonte, Merle; Meonis, Wm. J.; Menk, William; Mierisch, Charles L.; Meggison, John B.; Mead, Joseph T.; Meyer, Lidia and Gotlieb; Meadows, Juhan H., Mohoney, Ed.; Montgomery, Samuel; Mohan, Art., Monroe, C., Morrison, Albert; Moomaw, Arthur and Eugene; Morgan, George Francis; Morrow, Thomas; Moran, Thomas or Michael; Morningstar, Richard; Murphy, Floyd.

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MISCELLANEOUS: Bush, Jack; Welch, Red; Wilensky; Blesh, Rudolf P.; Nicholson, Color-Sergeant Thomas; Haynes, Eddie; Baker, Lee; Benson; Rutherford, John, Emma and Lena; Wood, Sarah; Miller, Goldenberg, Burke, Arbogast, Kane; Coles, Hildegards R.; Jenks, Althea, Nellie; S. Ray T.; Lawrence Shato; Thurston Houghton; Frank Dewey; Otto Seaton; Corky Clark; Bernard Benny; Preston; Mr. McDonald; Chief Engineer or any of engine-room gang of tank-steamer *Montana*; MacBournie, Ernest, Aubrey, Eddie, Gordon, Frank and Hattie; Dodson, Claude E.; Miller, Bird; Boyd or any of the other boys I chummed with in Santa Fé; Brewer, Buchner, Lizzie, Prouty, Pop Caspers, Clarke and numerous others of the Old Quarantine squad; Ingelow, Crump, Empey, Thurston, Nowell, Alexander Harnfield, Cassier, Sgt. Rome and Corp. Carroll; Relatives of Maxmillian Louis Knotte; Relatives of Thomas Scully; Reilly, O'Leary, Savage, T. C. Collins, Morsea; Company A., 1st Kentucky; Burrill Grammer School Girls and Boys; Ali Mfg., Co. Attention boys of the 213th O. S., C. E. F., American Legion U. S. Naval Aviation Repair Base.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-FEBRUARY ISSUE

Here are seven stories of adventure on land and sea which are to be found in our next issue. Two more, including a complete novel, are described on page two.

EVIDENTLY NOT — *By W. C. Tuttle*

"*Magpie*" *Simpkins* disguises himself as a preacher, but both his vocabulary and thirst crack under the strain, and then things begin to happen.

ALMOST WHITE — *By Henry C. Rowland*

When *Salem Tarr* grabs an oar, breaks it across his knee and, with a piece in each huge fist, starts after the mutinous crew of the *Shark*, he does not know the purpose he is serving.

SO LONG, JIM! — *By Hapsburg Liebe*

When *Jim Lord*, superintendent of the logging-outfit on Skeleton Creek, contracts to use his fists only in self-defense, he has not yet met "*Bantam*" *McEllery* nor heard of this fourteen-year-old boy's propensity for getting into trouble.

THE GATE THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN Part II — *By Hugh Pendexter*

Beset by bandits and facing a possible Indian uprising, "*Uncle Dick*" *Wooton* finds he was mistaken in believing his fighting days are over.

CHECKERS AT HUNGRY HORSE — *By Robert J. Horton*

From the summit of a rocky ridge, *Boyer*, man-hunter, watches smoke rising from two different places in the valley, and realizes that at one of those spots is the man he is after, the man reputed to be a killer, whose speed with a gun is a tradition.

THE SPELL — *By Charles Beadle*

A Rhodesian witch-doctor finds that it is not impossible to work his magic upon a white man.

MANY A SLIP — *By Carl Clausen*

When the first mate decides to commit a murder, he shows a Teutonic care for detail. Yet he fails to take into consideration one factor which he later finds to be of much importance.

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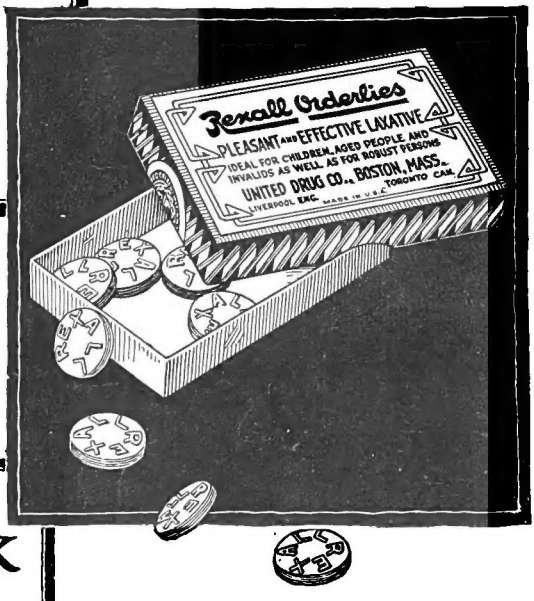
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